

SIVAJI

A HISTORICAL TALE OF THE GREAT MAHRATTA HERO & PATRIOT

BY

ROMESH C DUTT, C I F, I C S

Author of 'The Ramayana & Mahabharata'

Rendered into English

BY

AJOY C DUIT, B A (OXON) *Barrister at Law*

Sometime Member of the Bengal Legislative Council,

Lecturer in History, Post Graduate Department

Calcutta University

KITABISTAN

ALLAHABAD

PUBLISHED BY
KITABISTAN, ALLAHABAD

First Published in 1944

To
My Wife
— AND —
My Sons & Daughters

PREFACE

The character of a nation is moulded by its heroes. Memories of Drake and Nelson have built the British sailor, of Marlborough and Wellington, the British soldier. Trafalgar and Waterloo are the proudest bulwarks of England today.

India too has her great heroes. Asoka's conquests, more than two thousand years ago, built up an empire larger than the British possessions in India. Akbar reared the proudest and the most powerful sovereignty in the world when England was in the grip of a mighty struggle with Spain. Sivaji, a son of a jaigirdar, built up an extensive kingdom, and his power still continues in the Indian states of Baroda, and Indore.

Britain remembers her heroes and heroines. India, alas ! has forgotten her past. Prithu Rai and Durgavati are strangers in the land of their achievements, the names of Akbar and Rana Pratap Singh have never been heard by the teeming millions of India, the past has been entirely cut off from the present.

It was to revive and popularize the glorious memories of old that Romesh Dutt, seventy years ago, wrote his four historical novels "Madhavi

Kankan," which portrays the Moghul court and household, and furnishes a vivid picture of Indian life in the 17th century, was rendered into English by the author himself, and appeared in the guise of "The Slave Girl of Agra" (Fisher Unwin, London) My translation of "Rajput Jivan Sandhya", which is named "Pratap Singh, (Kitabistan, Allahabad) has been very kindly received I have received letters of appreciation from readers unknown to me I feel very grateful I have been encouraged to place before the public a translation of another novel by Romesh Dutt,— "Maharashtra Jivan Prabhat" I have called it "Sivaji"

"Sivaji" is a master-piece of character-painting The author reveals himself not only as a powerful story-writer but also as a historian of keen insight and sound judgment The Mahratta hero and Aurangzeb have been painted in bold striking colours They stand before the eyes of the reader in flesh and blood, pulsating with life He can see into their hearts, and feel the impact of the fierce impulses and passions that drive them into action Sivaji is the hero of the story, but he does not escape the censure of the historian, Aurangzeb has been criticized, but it is the criticism of a sound historian which has been amply confirmed Jai Singh, Chand Khan and Rahmat Khan are noble figures, vividly depicted, Chandra Rao Jumladar, a man of fierce ambition, is true to life

The story records one long moment of thrills. Besides the storming of castles and desperate midnight raids, there are exciting episodes, such as the captivity of Sivaji and his clever escape, which hold the reader from start to finish. And the incidents with which Sivaji himself is connected, are not fiction, but true history. This makes the story doubly interesting.

My rendering is faithful to the original. Almost every sentence has been translated. I have, however, omitted the last chapter which records a very moving scene between a brother and sister. I found I could not reproduce the spirit and the delicate colouring of the touching picture in a translation.

I must thank my young friend, Sriyut Subodh Mitra, for helping me with the proofs of this book. In spite of our joint vigilance, however, some printing errors have crept in. I am sorry, but I am told that this is unavoidable in a first edition, especially, when the language is foreign.

ROMESH C. DUTT, CIE ICS

1848—1909

Romesh Chander Dutt was born in 1848. He belongs to an ancient Kayastha family of Bengal noted for its culture, especially in the field of literature. After completing his studies in India Mr. Dutt proceeded to England for further study. He passed the Indian Civil Service examination, taking the third place in order of merit among the candidates. He was posted in Bengal. He was the first Indian to be appointed a District Magistrate and a Divisional Commissioner. His constructive work in some of the districts is still remembered with feelings of gratitude by the people. He retired after twenty-five years of service. After retirement he devoted himself to literature and national work tending to the political advancement of India and the amelioration of the condition of its people. He was elected President of the Indian National Congress in its session in Lucknow. The last years of his life were spent in the service of the Baroda State. He was appointed Dewan or Prime Minister of Baroda where he introduced many useful far-reaching reforms. He died in 1909 while in service in Baroda.

Mr Dutt's whole life is an amazing picture of unselfish devotion to his country. He worked silently and away from the lime light. Shortly after he joined the Indian Civil Service he translated into Bengali the Rîgveda—a collection of 1028 Vedic hymns composed by the ancient Aryans between 1500 and 1000 years before Christ. His object was to familiarize the people of Bengal with the civilization and religion of the early Hindus of the Punjab. About this time Mr Dutt also wrote six Bengali novels, two social and four historical. Two of these novels, *Sangsar* and *Madhavi Kankan*, he himself after his retirement rendered into English,—*The Lake of Palms* (Chattr and Windus, London) and *The Slave Girl of Agra* (Fisher Unwin, London). When he was District Magistrate of Mymensingh he wrote *A History of Civilization of Ancient India* (Kegan Paul, London), which presents a graphic picture of the religion and the customs and social life of the Indian people from 2000 B C to 1000 A D. While in service he devoted himself to the amelioration of the condition of the peasantry of Bengal, and it was due mainly to his efforts that *The Bengal Tenancy Act* was passed.

After his retirement from service Mr Dutt wrote his *History of Early British Rule in India and India in the Victorian Age*, (Kegan Paul, London)—a comprehensive economic history dealing also

with the systems of land tenures in India from 1757 to 1900. About this time also he produced his *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* (J M Dent, London)—extracts rendered into English verse from the great Epics of Ancient India. He is the author of *Indian Poetry* (J M Dent, London),—selections rendered into English from the *Rigveda*, the *Buddhist Literature*, the *Upanishads* and the classical Sanskrit literature. Mr Dutt also wrote a large number of other books.

The memory of Romesh Chander Dutt is still cherished in every home in Bengal, and his reputation as an administrator, historian, a worker in his country's cause, and a man of letters is far flung throughout India. As a tribute to his memory the people of India have built a beautiful museum and library in Calcutta—*Romesh Bhavan*—which houses a rare archaeological collection and a vast store of ancient manuscripts and books comprising, among others, the entire literature of Bengal. His noble life is best epitomized in the following four simple lines that he wrote when he was a young man.

'Toil, 'tis the will of Heaven,
 Labour all thy mortal span,
 Rest unto us is not given,
 Toil, and help thy brother man.

SIVAJI.

CHAPTER I.

THE DAWN OF LIFE

Towards the end of the twelveth century of the Christian era Muhammad Ghorî conquered Aryavarta, and within the next two centuries the whole of Bharatvarsha passed into the hands of the Moslems. After the conquest of this vast and wealthy kingdom for a hundred years or so the Moslems refrained from further aggressions, and they made no attempt to cross the great wall of the Vindhya mountains and the river Narbada and extend their sway over the Deccan and Southern India. Towards the end of the thirteenth century, however, Ala-ud-din Khiljî, the Prince of Delhi crossed the Narbada with eight thousand horse and suddenly appeared before the Hindu capital, Devgarh. The Prince of Devgarh attacked Ala-ud-din with a strong force, but in that great battle the Hindus were defeated and were forced to purchase peace by the cession of the district

of Ellichpur and a gift of a large sum of money. Later, when Ala-ud-din became Emperor of Delhi his general Malik Kafur invaded the Deccan on three occasions and devastated and plundered the whole country from the Narbada to Cape Comorin in the south. Devgarh came under the rule of the Mahomedan monarch of Delhi. In the fourteenth century Muhammad Tughlak after ascending the throne attempted to transfer the imperial capital from Delhi to Devgarh. He changed the name of the town to Daulatabad. The scheme was vigorously opposed by both the Hindu and the Mahomedan population of the Deccan. The Hindus created a new large kingdom with its capital at Vijaynagar and the Mahomedans followed their example and built the powerful kingdom of Daulatabad. In course of time Vijaynagar and Daulatabad became the most powerful kingdoms in Southern India which for the next two hundred years remained free from the attack of the Emperors of Delhi.

But although danger from Northern India ceased, perils continued to threaten the kingdom of Vijaynagar. The Hindus had permitted the new kingdom of Daulatabad to be built in their neighbourhood. Hindu national life was at the time feeble and decadent, whereas that of the conquering Moslems was full of vigour and on the ascendant. So one race accomplished the down-

fall of the other. In course of time Daulatabad owing to its size began to split up, and in place of one there grew up three large and powerful kingdoms, Bijapur, Golconda and Ahmadnagar. The Moslem kingdoms joined hands and in the year 1565 their united forces defeated the army of Vijaynagar and completely wiped out the Hindu kingdom. Bijapur, Golconda and Ahmadnagar became henceforth the three most powerful kingdoms in Southern India. The Hindu kingdoms of Karnat and Dravida in course of time accepted the suzerainty of Bijapur and Golconda.

In the year 1590 Emperor Akbar made an attempt to extend his empire over the Deccan, and before his death his armies conquered the whole of Khandesh and the greater part of Ahmadnagar. His grandson Shah Jahan effected the conquest of the entire kingdom of Ahmadnagar by 1636, and so at the time of our story Bijapur and Golconda were the only two powerful states in Southern India.

It is necessary for us now to understand the condition of the people of the Deccan, namely the Mahrattas, during the long period of wars and political disturbances. The Hindus were fairly prosperous under the Moslem rule of Ahmadnagar, Bijapur and Golconda. In reality the administration was in a large measure carried on by the wisdom and skill of the Mahratta inhabitants. A

kingdom was divided into a number of *sarkars* and each *sarkar* into a number of *parganas*. Occasionally Moslem administrators were appointed over *sarkars* and *parganas*, but very frequently the collection of the taxes was entrusted to Mahratta officials who remitted the same to the royal treasury. The Mahratta country is mountainous, and countless fortresses had been built on the top of hills over this vast region. The Moslem monarchs had no hesitation in entrusting the defence of these fortresses to the Mahrattas. The keepers of these fortified castles received *jaagir* lands and from their proceeds met the expenses of the defence and upkeep of these castles. Besides the keepers and other chiefs a large number of 'Hindu *mansabdars* were also employed. They were military officers in command of units of one hundred, two hundred, five hundred or a thousand horse, and when required for purpose of war, were obliged to assist their monarchs with their contingents. These officers enjoyed the revenues of *jaigirs* from which the pay of their men and other expenses were met. Chandra Rao More was an officer in command of twelve thousand foot under the Sultan of Bijapur, and by his order he conquered the entire tract of country between the rivers Nira and Varna. So pleased was the Sultan with the achievement that he made a gift of the conquered territory to Chandra Rao More as a *jaagir*.

on payment of a nominal rent to him Chandra Rao More and his descendants to the seventh generation enjoyed the title of Raja and administered the country over a contented and happy people. Similarly, Rao Naek and his descendants administered Fultan, and powerful Mahratta dynasties governed Kapasi and Mudhol and the provinces of Mallari and Mushwar, Jhatta and War. These families settled in their respective domains and continued to administer them for generations under the Sultan of Bijapur and sometimes engaged in fierce wars amongst themselves. There are no feuds more deadly than domestic feuds. In the hilly Mahratta and Konkan districts these feuds between leading chiefs were common at all times, and many a fierce fight was fought amongst them in the recesses of the mountains or in the fertile valleys. Though much blood was shed this was a good and not an evil sign. Physical exercise makes our bodies firm and strong, in like manner constant struggle, strife and conflict preserve and strengthen the life of a race. Thus the crimson dawn of Mahratta ascendancy tinted the Indian sky long before the advent of Sivaji.

There were two families of repute, those of Jadav Rao and Bhonsla, under the Sultan of Ahmadnagar. Throughout the Mahratta country there was no more powerful dynasty than that of Jadav Rao of Sindhu Kshira, and many are of

opinion that it had its source in the ancient royal house that ruled over Devgarh. In the seventeenth century there was a great general named Lakshmi Jadav Rao under the Sultan of Ahmadnagar. He was in command of a contingent of ten thousand horse and enjoyed the possession of an extensive *jaagir*. The Bhonsla family, although not as distinguished as that of Jadav Rao, was also noted for its greatness and power. Only the fact need be mentioned here that Sivaji's mother was descended from the stock of Jadav Rao and his father from that of Bhonsla.

CHAPTER II.

RAGHUNATHJI HAVILDAR

The landscape of Konkan assumes an awesome grandeur in the season of the rains. In the spring one afternoon a striking beauty invested the mountain scene. The sun had not set, but the entire sky was blotted out by large masses of dark heavy clouds, and the mountain ranges all round and the endless stretch of forests were steeped in a deep gloom. There was no sound in the hills and the valleys, in the broad plains, in the sky or on the earth, as if nature had been hushed into silence by the dread of a mighty impending tempest. The mountain pathways in the nearer hills were visible, but the distant ranges covered with thick forest appeared as black silhouettes, and the deep valleys were steeped in absolute darkness. The mountain springs and rivulets that gleamed like silver threads in places, disappeared in the shadows below and only revealed their presence by the murmur of their waters.

One solitary horseman was seen swiftly moving along a mountain path. His steed was covered with sweat and foam and his clothes were soiled with slush and dust. He seemed to

have travelled from a great distance. He carried a lance and a sword, and a shield over his left arm, his body was protected by bright armour. His dress and turban were of the Mahratta type. He appeared to be about eighteen years of age, but he was taller and his complexion somewhat lighter than the average Mahratta. The tropical sun and his hard duties had, however, bronzed his features. They had given physical strength and firmness to a well-knit body. A lofty forehead, bright eyes, a fair complexion and an open countenance full of youthful fire featured the young man. He jumped off his mount to give the animal some rest, threw the reins over the branch of a tree, placed his lance against a tree-stem, wiped the perspiration from his brow, brushed back his long hair that fell over his forehead and for a while gazed at the wide open sky.

The aspect was awe-inspiring and there could be no doubt that a terrific tempest was impending. A gentle wind began to rise, a deep note came from the vast range of mountains and the heavy woods, the muffled roll of thunder vibrated through the air. One or two drops of rain fell on his dry lips. This was no time to continue his course and a halt was opportune until the sky cleared. But the young man had no leisure for thought, the task he had in hand was urgent and his master would accept no excuses. Nor was it

in his nature to make delays and offer excuses
He picked up his lance, jumped on his steed that
made the sword rattle, gazed at the sky for a
moment and sped forward like the wind waking
the sleeping echoes of the mountains

Soon the tempest burst A flash of lightning
quivered across the sky from end to end, and a
peal of thunder with multiplied reverberations
rattled over the endless mountain ranges With
a terrific roar and the might of a million demons
the storm burst and seemed to shake the hills from
their very foundations the deep woods around
responded with piercing shrieks and groans, the
mountain springs and torrents flung their water
in showering spray A constant stream of light-
ning revealed the terrific conflict of nature in that
broad and open landscape, a torrential shower of
rain descended from the heavens, flooded the
mountains, the woods and the valleys and swelled
the torrents and mountain streams

Undeterred by nature's tumult the horseman
continued his course with unabated speed, and at
times it seemed that both man and horse would be
blown off and hurled down into the valley A
branch of a tree carried by the wind tore his
turban and drew blood from his forehead, but his
task could not be delayed and without a moment's
thought he continued his course with such precau-
tions as the circumstances permitted The down-

pour continued for three or four hours and then the clouds began to lift. The rain stopped, and soon after the entire landscape of hills and forests, fresh from a bath, glowed with intense beauty in the level rays of the setting sun.

The rider arrived at his destination, the fortress of Torna, on the top of a hill. He stopped his horse, pushed back his long hair from over his forehead and gazed on the plains below. A panorama of hills, fading away in the distance with its two or three thousand peaks towering above the valley and clothed from peak to base in dense foliage of vivid green, fresh from a nature's bath and shimmering in the golden light of the setting sun, presented a picture of ineffable loveliness. Nature's fountains swollen by the rain proudly flung their showers of spray, gleaming with miniature rainbows, from hill to hill, and the level rays of the sinking sun painted the mountain sides and the entire landscape in ever changing and bewitching colours.

The rider enjoyed the scene for a moment and then glancing at the sun he hastened towards the citadel. He presented his credentials and entering the gate looked back and saw the sun about to disappear behind the horizon. There was a clang and a rattle and the gate closed.

"You have not come a moment too soon," said

the warder, "a moment's delay and you would have passed the night outside the castle wall"

"That moment I managed to save" he said, "I shall keep the promise I made to my master in presence of the Goddess Bhawani. I shall communicate his orders to the master of the fort to-night."

He presented himself in front of the palace and was admitted. He made his obeisance to the master and placed before him some papers which he drew out from his waist-band. The master, a Mawali and a trusted friend of Sivaji, had been expecting these documents, without looking at the messenger he began to peruse them with great care and attention.

War with the Emperor of Delhi was about to commence. The despatch dealt with the present political situation, the manner in which the master of Fortna was required to assist Sivaji and contained detailed instructions on various military matters. After perusing the letters he fixed his eyes on the envoy. He was struck with his youthful appearance, his frank and open countenance, graced with a profusion of long jet black hair that fell over his forehead, and his tall and well-knit form. He looked at the documents again and then fixing a piercing gaze at the young soldier, he said "Havildar, your name is Raghunathji you are a Kshatriya?"

Raghunath assented with a respectful bow

"In appearance you are only a lad, but I believe you would not shrink from any duty, however difficult, that may be entrusted to you "

"A man can but do his best I have never yet failed my master success is in the hands of the Goddess Bhawani "

"How did you do the journey from Singhagarh to Torna so quickly ?"

"I had promised to do so "

The master of the fort smiled He was pleased with the reply "Your appearance" he said "is sufficient proof of the manner in which you discharge your duty " Water was dripping from Raghunath's clothing and his forehead was marked with blood

Later, the master questioned him minutely about Poona, about the Mahrattas, the Rajput and the Moghul forces, and their respective strength Raghunath gave him all the information that he possessed

"See me tomorrow morning" said the master of the fort, "and my letters will be ready And convey from me to Sivaji the message that the envoy he has chosen to perform this very important duty is not unworthy of it " Raghunath expressed his gratitude with a respectful bow

He then left the presence of the master The latter had tested him minutely with

questions as it was necessary to send some very secret information and advices to Sivaji. This could not all be done in the form of documents as there was risk of their falling in the hands of the enemy. Some very secret advices had to be communicated verbally, and the master of the fort wished to make sure that neither bribery or other means would induce the messenger to betray them. After Raghunath had left him he smiled and muttered "In these matters Sivaji is very wise he always gets the right man for every task."

CHAPTER III

SARAYU BALA

Leaving the master of the fort Raghunath made his way towards the temple of Bhawani. Soon after the acquisition of this fortress of Torna Sivaji had built a temple and installed an image of the Goddess Bhawani in it, and he appointed a high born Brahmin from Ambar as priest of the temple. It was always the practice of the Mahratta leader to offer propitiatory offerings to the Goddess before embarking on any important enterprise.

Raghunath proceeded towards the temple with a light heart humming a war song, his long hair floating in the breeze. The evening shadows were closing round when he approached the temple. The white building looked beautiful in the fading light of the western sky. A small flower garden by the side of the temple was in the shadows. The priest was not in his quarters. Raghunath sat down on a rock in the garden and rested.

While he waited a young girl strolled into the garden to gather flowers. Raghunath was struck with her appearance for she did not belong to that country. Her costume revealed her Rajput des-

cent His heart leaped within him at the sight of a girl from his own country after so many years He longed to go up to her and question her about herself, but subduing the impulse he continued seated on the rock under a tree with his eyes fixed on her The more he gazed the more drawn he felt to the girl

The girl was approximately thirteen years of age Her black hair, glossy as silk, covered her neck and back and partially shaded her features and her large dark eyes Her arched eye-brows, as if drawn by a painter's brush, heightened the beauty of her smooth clear forehead Her lips were delicate, blood-red Gold armlets and bracelets decorated her gracefully rounded arms and wrists The evening light fell on her brow and brightened the lustre of a complexion of molten gold A necklace graced her neck and rested on the gentle swell of her bosom Raghu-nath gazed at the Rajput girl, veiled by the subdued light of the evening, with open eyes of wonder His soul vibrated with a joy he had never known before

She gathered her flowers and as she was about to leave the garden her eyes fell on a tall and well-built youth at a little distance He was gazing at her The colour mounted to her face and she bent down her head She looked again He was still there His flowing hair shaded a

noble brow and a pair of bright eyes. A sword hung by his side and in his right hand was a lance. He was gazing at her with wide motionless eyes. She was surprised to see a soldier from her own country in a Mahratta fortress. She was struck by his noble appearance. She bent down her head again and with her bouquet of flowers she went in.

Raghunath came to himself. He slowly walked towards the temple to meet the priest. His countenance was thoughtful. He entered the building and waited for the holy man. We shall take this opportunity to say a few words about the Brahmin.

We have already said that he belonged to a noble family of Rajputana. His name was Janardan Dev. He was a member of the council of Jai Singh, the famous Raja of Ambar. At the request of Sivaji and with the consent of the raja he came to reside in the fort of Torna which was Sivaji's first acquisition. He had no children, but shortly before he left his country he had undertaken the charge of a Kshatriya girl. Her father was a friend of his childhood and her mother and Janardan's wife were like sisters. After the death of her parents Janardan and his wife took charge of the orphan Kshatriya girl and took her with them to Torna and brought her up as their own child. After the death of Janardan's wife the

Kishatniya girl became the sole object of his affection. Sarayu regarded and loved Janardan as her father. In course of time she grew up to be a beautiful girl, and people in the fort chaffingly called the Brahmin Kanva Muni and the girl Sakuntala. The sorrows of his exile were relieved by the love and attachment of his adopted daughter.

Janardan entered the temple where Raghunath had been waiting for him. He was about fifty years of age, tall and still strong. His eyes mirrored peace. His chest was broad and his arms long and powerful. He had a fair complexion. His sacred thread hung from his shoulders. His countenance revealed the purity of his mind and his frank simple heart. With slow steps he entered the temple. Raghunath rose from his seat respectfully.

After the exchange of a few words of courtesy they sat down and Janardan asked news of Sivaji. Raghunath furnished all the news of the war that he possessed, conveyed the greetings of his master and placed a few gold coins in his hand.

"My master will shortly commence hostilities with the Moghuls," he said, "it is his prayer that propitiatory offerings be made to the Goddess for his victory. Human effort is vain without her blessings."

Janardan replied in a deep solemn voice "It

is our duty to do our utmost for the preservation of the true religion I shall surely make suitable offerings to the Goddess for the victory of Sivaji who is the main support of that religion Tell your master there will be no default or neglect in this respect "

"My master has another prayer he wishes to lay at the feet of the Goddess He will shortly be involved in a great war Will the Devi be pleased to reveal the future event ? With your divine knowledge and penetrating vision you can satisfy the wish of my master "

Janardan closed his eyes for a while and then replied in a deep voice "I shall lay Sivaji's prayer before the Devi, you will get the answer to-morrow at dawn."

Raghunath thanked the priest and was about to leave when the latter asked "I have never seen you here before, is this your first visit to Torna ?"

"Yes, I arrived here to-day" replied Raghunath

"Do you know any one in the fortress ? Have you a place to sleep in ?"

"No, I do not know any one here, but I shall find a place somewhere to pass the night, to-morrow morning I leave "

"There is no need for you to be inconvenienced" said the priest,

"I shall not be inconvenienced we have often to pass nights in strange places

Raghunath's frank and open countenance and his manner of speaking touched the heart of the priest "My boy", he said, "pain and suffering are unavoidable in war, but there is no reason why you should have an uncomfortable night here. Remain in this temple, my adopted daughter will prepare a meal for you, take a good night's rest and to-morrow morning you can carry the message of the Goddess to Sivaji."

Raghunath felt a sudden thrill within him, he felt something knock against his heart. Was this joy or pain? Who was the adopted daughter? Was she the beautiful Rajput girl he had seen in the garden?

CHAPTER IV.

THE NECKLACE

At 9 o'clock in the evening Sarayu at her father's request arranged a meal for their guest Raghunath took his seat while she stood behind him It has always been a custom amongst the Mahrattas, which continues even now, for some lady of the family to attend on the guest personally during his meals

Raghunath sat down but his heart was restless Sarayu had prepared various kinds of dishes, but the guest did not quite know what he ate Janardan, the priest, talked eagerly about his native land, Rajasthan Raghunath replied to his questions mechanically, his thoughts were elsewhere The meal ended Sarayu placed *sharbat* before him in a white stone cup Raghunath looked at her with longing eyes, his whole soul was concentrated in the gaze Their eyes met, a blush coloured her features, she closed her eyes, bent down her head and slowly moved away Raghunath, ashamed of his impropriety, looked down upon the ground

Sarayū brought some water with which to wash his hands and placed it before him Raghunath was not a barbarian He did not raise his head,

he merely looked at her beautiful hands and the soft curves of her arms with their gold rings and armlets.

A bed was spread for him. Raghunath instead of lying down opened the door and strolled out into the adjacent garden.

He gazed at the wide open sky jewelled with stars. Where were his thoughts? The shadows of the night deepened. In the solemn darkness man, beast and all living things seemed to be wrapped in slumber. There was no sound in the fortress except the occasional cry of the watchmen. The note of the bells that marked the passing of the hours roused the echoes of the surrounding hills on that moonless night. He could not lie down and rest. Where were his thoughts?

Why he was pacing the lonely garden Raghunath could not tell. He had been a child so long. Tonight a new light seemed to appear in the peaceful blue sky of his life, a latent feeling, a powerful impulse awoke within him. Again and again the picture of the Rajput girl appeared before his eyes,—the delicate pencilled eye-brows, the sweet flower lips, the jet-black hair, the large soft eyes, the ravishing beauty. Raghunath 'can you aspire to that lovely form?' You are only a common havildar. Janardan is a Brahmin of noble descent and Sarayu a fit bride for a royal prince. Why do you torture your soul with a vain hope?

Why do you cherish a burning thirst that can never be quenched ?

But in our youth hope is all powerful and we do not easily give way to despair Things that cannot be done we consider possible , the improbable we consider probable Long did he gaze at the sky wrapped in thought He then stood up and placed his hands on his chest Thus he remained for a long while

“God help me and I shall certainly succeed,” he muttered “Fame, reputation, glory, man can achieve , why should I not achieve them ? Is my body less firm, my arm less powerful than those of others ? Oh Gods, help me My father’s fame shall live in me, I shall achieve the glory worthy of a Rajput , and then ? If I attain success, Sarayu, I shall not be unworthy of you I shall tell you in the form of a beautiful story what I have thought and felt tonight your sweet hands I shall place over this yearning heart, and those lips, like the petals of a rose, I shall—”

Raghunath ! Raghunath ! Beware of madness

With his mind somewhat appeased as he turned to go to his room he noticed a necklace lying on the ground, a string of corals and pearls,—a coral between two pearls on either side She had been wearing this necklace in the evening and had probably dropped it while she was going in Raghunath looked up at the sky “O God !” he

muttered, "is this Thy token of the fulfilment of my hopes?"

He fell asleep in his bed with the necklace close to his heart. Next morning he met Janardan Dev and ascertained the message of the Goddess "Victory in a war with the *Mlechchas*—foreigners, defeat in a war with the Hindus." This was the message.

Before leaving the fort Raghunath saw Sarayu once again. In the morning when she came to the garden to pick flowers Raghunath approached her. Suppressing his feelings he spoke in a tremulous voice. "Lady" he said "I found this necklace last evening lying here on the ground. I have come to return it to you. Please forgive the intrusion."

Sarayu heard these gentle words and turned round. She saw the same young soldier with the frank handsome face, the lofty forehead shaded by a profusion of flowing locks, the sparkling eyes. A deep blush suffused her fair features.

"With your permission, lady," he said, "may I place this necklace in its proper place. Pray grant me this request and God will make you happy."

Sarayu turned her eyes on Raghunath. Her heart fluttered at the gaze of those large eyes. Bashfulness overwhelmed her and her face flushed crimson. She closed her eyes. Receiving this

as a token of tacit assent Raghunath gently placed the necklace round her neck His hands did not touch her form

After a pause he said "Lady, give me your leave to depart '

Mastering her emotions and bashfulness she turned her gaze on Raghunath for a moment, and then looking away she spoke in a low voice "I am very grateful to you," she said, "if you visit their fort again I trust you will stay in my father's house "

Like fresh drops of rain to the thirsty skylark or the crimson dawn to the benighted traveller, these first words of Sarayu flooded the heart of Raghunath with a feeling of exquisite joy "Lady", he said, "I am the servant of another, my profession is arms , I do not know when I shall come here again, if I ever do , but so long as I live, not for a single moment shall I cease to remember your courtesy, your kindness and your divine form "

Sarayu could make no reply Raghunath saw that her eyes were wet , his own moistened

CHAPTER V

SAYESTA KHAN

Although Sivaji's power and the extent of his territory and the number of his forts were daily increasing for sometime, the Emperor of Delhi made no serious attempt to bring him under control until the year 1660. That year Sayesta Khan, decorated with the title of Amir-ul-Umra, was appointed Supreme Governor of the Deccan and received instruction to subdue Sivaji. The same year Sayesta Khan took possession of Poona and the fort of Chikan and some other places, and in the following year, that is, when our story begins, he made arrangements completely to destroy Sivaji. The same year Jaswant Singh, the famous Raja of Marwar by the Emperor's command joined Sayesta Khan with a powerful force and thus made the position of Sivaji extremely perilous. The Moghul and Rajput troops made their camp near Poona, and Sayesta Khan himself took up his residence in the house of Dadaji Kanai Dev where Sivaji had passed his childhood days with his mother. Sayesta Khan was fully aware of Sivaji's crafty methods, and he gave orders that no Mahratta was to be admitted within the town.

without a passport Sivaji was in Singhagarh, a fortress in the vicinity of Poona. The Mahrattas at the time had little experience of war and it was not possible for them to meet the well-trained imperial troops in the open field. The only way to maintain and extend Hindu power, Sivaji found, was by clever tactics.

One evening towards the end of Chaitra Sayesta Khan convened his ministers and councillors to a conference to discuss war matters and the ways and means of crushing Sivaji. The conference was held in the home of Dadaji Kanai Dev. The hall was brilliantly lighted and a breeze came in through the open windows with a refreshing smell of flowers. The sky was dark outside and only a few stars were visible.

Anori, a courtier, spoke: "The Mahrattas will fly before the Amir's forces like leaves in a storm or they will hide themselves in the earth."

There was an old soldier in the conference named Chand Khan who had experience of the courage and shrewdness of the Mahrattas. "Yes," he said, "they are quick to move and difficult to locate."

"How do you know that?" asked Sayesta Khan.

"A small number of Mahrattas found their way into the fort of Chakan last year. Your honour remembers that it took us fully two months with

all our forces to extricate them and to reduce the fortress. We lost a great number of soldiers to get possession of a single fortress. And again this year, inspite of the presence of our troops all round, Nitaji flew across the sky and devastated the whole country up to the confines of Ahmadnagar and Aurangabad

"Chand Khan is getting old he is now afraid of a mountain rat" said Sayesta Khan, "he was different in the old days" Sayesta Khan flushed with anger but said nothing

"Your honour has described the Mahratta correctly," said Anori, "he is a species of the mountain rat that can hide himself in a hole"

"I trust the mountain rat may not find a suitable hole in Poona and come out for mischief," said Chand Khan

"We have thousands of Delhi cats here with sharp claws the rat will be harmless" replied Sayesta Khan

This remark was greeted with a chorus of "*Karamat Karamat*"

Many such jokes were made and then the conversation turned to the strategy of the war. Since the storming of Chakan Sayesta Khan had realized the difficulty of reducing Sivaji by the method of capturing his fortresses. He said "The region bristles with mountain fortresses, and if we are to take them one by one there is no

certainly when we shall gain our objective, if we do do so at all "

"Your honour knows that the strength of the Mahrattas lies in these fortresses," said Chand Khan "They will never fight a pitched battle , and if they do and are beaten, no harm will be done The country is hilly, their troops will fly from one spot and appear in another from a different direction We shall not be able to get news of their movements But if we take their fortresses one by one they must ultimately submit "

"Can't we pursue and overtake the Mahrattas when they are running away after a defeat in a pitched battle ? We have a strong cavalry Can't we follow them and destroy their entire army ?

"If there is a pitched battle the Moghuls must certainly win," said Chand Khan If we can catch the enemy we shall certainly destroy him , there is no doubt of that But no cavalry in Hindusthan can overtake the Mahratta horsemen in this hilly region Our steeds are big, our horsemen are heavily armed and carry many weapons , on level ground in a pitched battle their charge is terrific, irresistible , but in a mountainous country they cannot act efficiently Whereas, the small Mahratta ponies, like mountain goats, can leap from crag to crag, run up the hills and can fly like the mountain deer through valleys and gorges with the greatest

ease Your honour will please listen to my advice Sivaji is just now in Singhagarh A month or two, or perhaps three, and we shall take the place Sivaji will be our prisoner and the Emperor will secure an easy victory What do we gain by waiting for the Mahrattas in this place in the vain hope of pursuing them if they appear Not long ago Nitaji passed quite close to us and devastated Ahmadnagar and Ahmadabad Rustum Jaman pursued him What did he achieve ?”

“Rustum Jaman acted like a traitor or Nitaji would not have escaped so easily,” said Sayesta Khan with great wrath, “I shall see that he is suitably punished You too oppose a pitched battle with the enemy, Chand Khan, is there not a single courageous man among the Emperor’s soldiers ?”

Chand Khan’s face flushed with anger, he turned away his head and wiped a tear-drop from his eye, then fixing a steady gaze on Sayesta Khan he said slowly “I am not competent to give advice, your honour will make your plans, your servant will not shirk any task that may be imposed on him ”

At this moment a sentry announced the arrival of an envoy from Singhagarh, a Brahmin named Mahadeoji Niaya Sastri He was waiting below Sayesta Khan was expecting him He ordered him

to be brought in Everybody felt curious to see him

After a while Mahadeoji Niaya Sastri entered the council hall He appeared not less than forty years of age , he had the Mahratta build and was short and dark Clear cut features, a broad chest, long arms and sparkling intelligent eyes characterized the man A band of sandal-paste decorated his forehead , the Brahminical sacred thread hung loose from his shoulder , a long cotton-quilted coat covered his body so that the lines of his figure could not be seen , an enormous turban on his head cast a heavy shadow over his features Sayesta Khan greeted the messenger and offered him a seat

“And what is the news of Singhagarh ?” asked Sayesta Khan

Mahadeoji recited a Sanskrit couplet

“सन्ति नद्या दण्डकेषु तथा पञ्चवटी बने ।

सरयू विच्छेद शोक राघवस्तु कथं सहेत् ॥”

Which means In the forest of Dandaka, in the woods of Panchavati there are hundreds of rivers, but can those efface the sorrow of separation from the river Sarayu from the heart of Raghava ? Sivaji yet possesses hundreds of fortresses, but Poona is in your hands the sorrow cannot be effaced from his heart ”

Sayesta Khan was pleased “Yes,” he said,

“I am in possession of the principal fortress and tell your Master that further fight is useless. Submission to Delhi is now his only hope of safety ”

The Brahmin smiled and recited another couplet

“ नशक्तो हि स्वाभिलाष ज्ञातयितुञ्चातकः ।
ज्ञात्वा तु तत् वारिधिरस्तोषयति याचकम् ॥”

This means The skylark cannot convey his desire to the cloud in words, but the cloud understands the desire and through the kindness of his heart satisfies it This is the manner of great men towards supplicants My master Sivaji has lost Poona and the fortress of Chakan but he is ashamed to seek for peace, and yet he will gratefully accept whatever your honour's generosity may offer ”

Sayesta Khan could not suppress his delight “Punditji,” he said, “I cannot tell you how pleased I am with your learning How beautiful and pregnant of thought is your Sanskrit language Is Sivaji really anxious for peace ?”

Mahadeoji replied

“ केशरिणः प्रतापेन भयविदग्धचेतसः ।
आहि देव आहि राजन् इति ब्रूवन्ति भूचराः ॥”

Which means the beasts of the forest being terrified by the mighty power of the lion cry out ‘O Deva ! O Raja ! spare us, spare us ’ In other

words, harrassed to death by the fierce prowess of Delhi's forces our cry is 'spare us, spare us'

Unable to suppress his delight Sayesta Khan exclaimed, "Brahmin Pundit, I am pleased with your learning If you are here with a proposal of peace from Sivaji let me see your letter of authority "

From the depths of his thick clothing the Brahmin produced a document Sayesta Khan examined it carefully for a long time and said "Yes, I am satisfied , now what is the proposal "

"My master is of opinion," said the Brahmin, "that since the war has begun with a victory for the enemy it is useless to prolong it "

"Good "

"And, therefore, he is anxious for peace "

"Good "

"And he wishes to know the terms which the Emperor of Delhi will be pleased to offer My master will try to accommodate him to the best of his power "

"Is your master willing to accept to the suzerainty of Delhi ?" asked Sayesta Khan

"I have no authority to answer that question," replied the Brahmin "If your honour will let me know the terms, I shall place them before my master and communicate his decision to you "

"Good," said Sayesta Khan Firstly, your master must submit to the suzerainty of the

Emperor of Delhi secondly, the fortresses that have already been conquered must remain with us, thirdly, Singhagarh and some other fortresses must be handed over to us "

"What other fortresses?" asked the Brahmin

"That I shall let you know in the course of a day or two Fourthly, the fortresses and the territory which Sivaji will be allowed to retain, he must hold as *jaigir* under the Emperor and pay an annual rent for them Convey these terms to your master and let me have his answer shortly "

"I shall carry out your honour's directions" replied the Brahmin, "and until peace is established their will be truce?"

"Certainly not" exclaimed Sayesta Khan, "I do not trust the cunning, deceitful Mahrattas There is no deception to which they will not stoop So long peace is not established this war must go on We shall try to destroy you and you can do the same to us "

"Be it so" said the Brahmin He then took his leave and went out of the hall His eyes seemed to emit sparks of fire

He came down with slow steps He examined every room, every door, carefully as he descended This aroused the curiosity of a sentry who asked him what he was doing

"This is the house where my master Sivaji

passed the days of his childhood," answered the Brahmin, "this also has passed into your hands It seems you will capture all our fortresses one by one O God !"

The sentry laughed "Why this vain regret ?" he said , "do your duty "

"You are right" answered the Brahmin, and he walked out of the house Within a few minutes he had mingled with the crowd and was seen no more.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PRIEST OF THE AUSPICIOUS CEREMONY

The Brahmin passed through a number of streets in Poona examining the surroundings very carefully as he went along. He entered one or two shops on the pretext of making purchases and gained information about certain matters he wished to know. He then left the bazaar behind, and turning from the main road entered a narrow lane. The lights there had been put out and the people had closed their doors and retired for the night.

The Brahmin proceeded along the lane for quite a distance. The sky was dark above and only a few stars were visible. The people were asleep in their houses and the world was silent. Something roused the suspicion of the Brahmin, he thought he heard footsteps behind him. He stopped for a while, the sound he seemed to have heard also ceased.

He resumed his course. A little while later he thought that someone was following him. He felt uneasy. Who was dogging him on that dark night? A friend or foe? If a foe, did he recognize him? In a state of deep apprehension he stopped to think and then silently drew out a knife

from the quilted sleeve of his coat and took his stand on one side of the lane. He peered into the thick darkness for a long while. No, there was nobody near, the whole town was silent and without a sound.

Filled with suspicion the Brahmin returned to the well-lighted bazaar. It was still alive with people of different nationalities buying and selling things. He mingled with the throng, and then very suddenly he turned into another lane and threading his way with quick steps through a number of by-lanes arrived on the outskirts of the town. There he stopped, and holding his breath for a long time, waited. There was not a sound. On all sides the roads, ghats, huts and buildings were wrapped in deep silence, the black sky threw its shadow on the world. Suddenly he heard a cry, his heart fluttered, he waited, silent.

Again the cry. He felt relieved. It was the watchman doing his rounds, unfortunately he appeared to be coming up the very lane where the Brahmin had taken his stand. The lane was very narrow. The Brahmin drew his knife again and remained stationary protected by the impenetrable darkness.

The watchman slowly came to the spot and cast his glance around him. He looked in the direction where Mahadeoji was standing. The

Brahmin's heart fluttered. He gripped his knife firmly, held his breath and stood.

The black curtain of the night saved him. With slow steps the watchman passed without seeing him. Mahadeoji now came out of the recess where he had concealed himself and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

He then knocked at an adjacent door. It opened and a Mahratta soldier attached to Sayesta Khan's army came out. They proceeded together to a very secluded and inaccessible spot of the town and sat down.

"Is everything ready?" asked the Brahmin.

"Everything," was the reply.

"Have you got the licence?"

"I have."

A faint sound of footsteps was heard again. The Brahmin this time, his eyes burning with rage, stepped forward knife in hand. He looked into the darkness and waited. A long pause. He could see nothing. He went back slowly to his companion.

"Have you come armed?" he inquired.

The Mahratta soldier drew out a knife from his bosom.

"Good, be on the alert, when is the wedding?"

"Tomorrow."

"Have you got the permission?" asked the Brahmin.

"I have "

"For how many men ?"

"Ten musicians and thirty armed guards" answered the Mahratta , "more they would not allow "

"That's enough What time ?"

"One *prahar* at night "

"Good The bridegroom's party will start from this direction "

"I shall remember" said the Mahratta

"The music must be very loud "

"I shall remember "

"Get as many friends and relations you can to join the marriage procession," said the Brahmin

"I shall remember "

The Brahmin smiled "I shall be the priest on the occasion The noise of the celebrations will be heard throughout India "

While he was speaking an arrow from the darkness struck the Brahmin on the chest The shaft would have proved fatal but for the protective armour under the quilted coat which saved his life The arrow broke in splinters and fell off A spear hurled with terrific force followed the arrow, struck the Brahmin and threw him on the ground, but the strong armour resisted the blow The Brahmin rose to his feet A tall Moghul soldier was standing before him It was Chand Khan He sprung upon the Brahmin and struck him fiercely with his sword

The wonderful armour again turned back the blow

"In an evil moment have you followed me," cried the Brahmin, drawing his knife from his sleeve and flashing it aloft. In the twinkling of an eye it descended on the chest of the Moghul and felled him.

The Brahmin's eyes were blazing, his lips were compressed. He drew out the knife from the human sheath and inserted it in his coat-sleeve, "Sayesta Khan, this is the first answer to the slander uttered against the Mahrattas, the second will follow tomorrow by the grace of Bhawan!"

At the moment when Chand Khan sacrificed his life in the service of his master, Sayesta Khan was dreaming beautiful dreams of his easy victory over Sivaji.

The Mahratta soldier had watched with amazement the incident that had occurred so quickly. "What have you done?" he said. "This will be noised through the town and wreck our plans for tomorrow."

"Have no fear" said the Brahmin. "Chand Khan was rebuked today by his master. I know this, and his absence from court for a few days will not arouse suspicion. Throw the body into that deep well and remember, tomorrow, at one *prahar* in the evening."

“At one *prahar* in the evening” replied the Mahratta soldier

The Brahmin silently left the town of Poona. He was challenged by the sentinels at three or four spots. He showed his pass-port and safely left the place

Chand Khan had been called a coward in the assembly. His hair had grown grey in military service, he had never before been accused of cowardice. He had been terribly hurt, but he would not reveal his feelings to others. He was resolved to wipe out the stain on his character by some daring deed or to die in the attempt.

The behaviour of the Brahmin had aroused his suspicion. He knew Sivaji only too well. He knew of the large number of fortresses under his command, the fleetness of his cavalry, his deep attachment for the Hindu religion, his purpose for the establishment of Hindu Raj, his solemn vow for the restoration of Hindu freedom — all this Chand Khan knew. It was not possible, he thought, that at the very commencement of hostilities Sivaji would acknowledge defeat and crave for terms of peace. And yet the Brahmin had his credentials from Sivaji himself. Who was the Brahmin? What were his secret intentions?

The words of the Brahmin had aroused his suspicion. He had noticed the fire blaze up in his eyes at the words of reproach of the Mahrattas.

He did not wish to express his opinion to Sayesta Khan because he knew he would be rebuked again, but he made up his mind to seize the false envoy. He followed this man. He followed him through lanes and by-lanes without being seen himself. He never lost sight of him.

He had heard the conversation between the Brahmin and the Mahratta soldier and at once understood the whole business. He decided to kill the false envoy and take the other man prisoner to his master, this would restore him to favour again. "Sayesta Khan," he muttered under his breath, "not in vain has my hair grown grey in military service. I am not a coward. I am not a traitor. I shall reveal the conspiracy I have detected and perhaps my advice in future will be treated with a little more consideration." But Chand Khan's hopes were not destined to be fulfilled. Hope is illusory.

Sayesta Khan, your unkind words have cost you the life of a priceless hero. When danger comes you will remember him, but you will not find him.

CHAPTER VII.

RAJA JASWANT SINGH.

It is midnight Raja Jaswant Singh is seated alone in his tent with his chin resting on his hand. He is deep in thought. A solitary lamp is burning in front of him. He is alone.

The arrival of a Mahratta envoy is announced. Jaswant Singh orders him to be brought in. He has been expecting him.

Mahadeoji Niaya Sastri enters the tent. Jaswant Singh receives him courteously and offers him a seat. They both sit down.

Neither of them spoke for a while. The Raja appeared to be engrossed in his thoughts. At last Jaswant spoke. "I have read your master's letters," he said, "do you bring any fresh proposals?"

"I have not been sent with any proposals," replied the envoy, "I have been sent to meet your highness."

"Poona and Chakan are the only two places we have taken. Is this the cause of your master's grief?"

"No, not for the loss of these places is he grieved, he has innumerable fortresses still in his possession."

"Then perhaps the peril in which he has involved himself by a war with the Moghuls has made him unhappy" said the Raja

"Perils are a part of his life", replied the envoy

"What then is the cause of his grief?" questioned the Raja

"The emblem of Hindu Raj, the glory of the Kshatriya race, the protector of the true religion, he is to-day the slave of the foreigner. This is the cause of my master's grief," said the envoy

Jaswant's face flushed crimson. Mahadeoji appeared not to notice it and continued to speak "Maharaja!" he said "you are connected, with the illustrious family of Pratap Singh of Mewar, you are the renowned monarch of the great kingdom of Marwar, your fame fills the whole of Rajasthan, your courage and gallantry on the banks of the Sipra startled and amazed even the Emperor Aurangzeb. You are the strongest pillar of the true religion for entire *Bharatvarsha*, for your glory and victory prayers are offered daily to the Deity by every Brahmin, by every Hindu, in every temple throughout the land. O great King of Marwar, you are to-day an ally of the Moslem. You have taken up arms against your co-religionists. This is the cause of the deep sorrow and distress of my master. Forgive me, sire, if I have been guilty of impropriety. But why this array of arms, these elaborate preparations for war, these

countless victory flags that fill the sky ? Are they for the advancement of the cause of your country, for the cause of Hindu freedom, for the glory of the Kshatriya race ? You are the emblem of Kshatriya honour and chivalry, sire , judge for yourself , I do not understand these things ”

Jaswant remained engrossed in his thoughts, his head bent down Mahadeo continued to speak “You are a Rajput, sire , the Mahrattas are descendants of Rajputs , the father and son cannot war with each other , the Goddess Bhawani herself has prohibited such a war Issue your command and we shall obey it , the glory of the Rajputs is the sole glory of friendless *Bharat-varsha* , songs of Rajput valour are still sung by our women throughout the land , our boys are reared and trained in the traditions of Rajput virtues Oh, mighty Kshatriya ! May the Mahratta name be completely effaced ere the Mahratta sword drink Rajput blood , better we cast aside our lance and sword and revert to the plough ”

Jaswant raised his eyes and spoke slowly “Noble envoy,” he said, “your words are sweet as honey , but I am a subject of the Emperor of Delhi I have come here to make war against the Mahrattas and I shall make war against them ”

“And destroy hundreds of your co-religionists” interrupted the envoy “Hindus will sever the

heads of Hindus, Brahmins will stab Brahmins, the blood of Kshatriyas will mingle with the blood of Kshatriyas, and all this for a victory of the foreigner !”

The colour mounted to the face of the Raja, but restraining himself he spoke in a harsh voice “It is not solely for a victory of the Emperor of Delhi,” he said “How can I be friends with your master ? Sivaji is treacherous Wily Sivaji makes a promise today and breaks it tomorrow without scruple ”

The Brahmin’s eyes sparkled but he spoke in a steady voice “Maharaj !” he said, “be careful of the words you utter Slander does not suit your lofty position When has Sivaji broken his word to a Hindu ? When has he failed to fulfil his promise to a Brahmin or Kshatriya There are hundreds of villages, hundreds of temples in our land Ask the people there Has Sivaji ever failed to fulfil his promise ? Has he ever denied his protection to Brahmins, his help to the Hindus his loving care for the welfare of the cattle, his offerings to the temples ? But the Moslem is his enemy Where do you find friendship and good faith between enemies ? The serpent in the claws of the vulture feigns death and remains motionless , when it is released it springs into life and strikes Is this treachery or is it the law of nature ? The hare employs tricks to dodge the

pursuing hounds to save its life Is this cunning or is it the law of nature ? God has given every living being a means to save its life Has he denied this gift to man ? For hundreds of years the Moslems have been attempting to destroy our freedom which is the soul of our souls, the life of our lives , they are sapping our strength, our reputation, our national glory and pride which are dearer to us than our heart's blood Can there be friendship and good faith with them ? Would you condemn our employing the only means we have for the preservation of our freedom dearer to us than life, our religion and our national, glory ? Would you call it treachery ? Would you blame the fleeing deer because he employs speed to outstrip the pursuing hounds, or the mother-bird because she lures away the hunter from the nest which shelters her offspring ? Kshatriya Raj ' every day, every hour of our lives we hear the enemy reviling us and accusing us of perfidy and cunning O noble Hindu, do not join him in condemning us The means we employ is the only means for the preservation of the Hindu race Do not slander Sivaji " The Brahmins burning eyes filled with tears

Raja Jaswant was moved "Noble envoy ' he said, "I did not wish to cause you pain, and if I have said anything that is wrong I ask your forgiveness I only wished to point out that the

Rajputs are also fighting for their country's freedom, but courage and valour in the open field is the method they employ to achieve their object. The Mahratta might employ the same method and achieve similar success."

"Maharaj!" said the envoy, "the Rajputs enjoy an ancient freedom. They have wealth, and their country is protected by impenetrable mountains and vast encircling deserts. They possess beautiful cities and a thousand years of fighting experience behind them. Which of these do the Maharattas possess? They are poor, they have been slaves for hundreds of years, this is their first lesson in warfare. If you are attacked you defend yourself according to the ancient traditions of your country and display your ancient valour and gallantry in the open field. The enemy retires before the hordes of Rajput troops. What means have we to defend ourselves when we are attacked? We have no warlike tradition, no experience in arms, our force is limited and there are few amongst us who have seen real warfare. When the Emperor of Delhi sends mighty armies from Kabul, the Punjab, Ajodhya, Bihar, Malwa and Rajasthan, the home of heroes, with their invincible strength of cavalry and war-tuskers, guns and ammunition, and supported by the entire wealth, the total resources of the empire, what means can we employ to defend ourselves? We

have not his experienced soldiers, his powerful horses and elephants and his enormous wealth. Our strength lies in quick movement, in mountain warfare and in resourcefulness, which is described as craft and cunning Kshatriya Raj ! In the beginning of national life of a poor people these are the only means of defence available. May God prosper the Mahratta race. When we have acquired the necessary wealth and the fighting experience of two or three hundred years, we too shall display the matchless martial qualities of the Rajputs "

Jaswant Singh had listened attentively. He was deep in thought, his head resting on his hand. Mahadeoji noticed that his words had taken effect. He commenced to speak again slowly.

"Maharaj", he said, "you are the Prince of Hindus, why do you doubt the future greatness of the Hindu race ? Your heart yearns for Hindu ascendancy. Sivaji wants nothing more. The destruction of Moslem rule, the rise of Hindu power, the building of temples all over the land, the glorification of the true religion, the spread of the culture of the *Sastras*, the protection of the Brahmin, the care of the cattle, these are what Sivaji wants, nothing more. If you do not wish to help him in this noble work, accomplish the task yourself. Assume the kingship of the country, destroy the Moslem rule, and give the Mah-

rattas their freedom Give the word, and we shall open the gates of our fortresses to you, the people will pay you the taxes You are a thousand times more powerful, more far-sighted, and worthier than Sivaji Sivaji will be content and happy to fight as one of your soldiers for the destruction of the Moslem rule He has no other ambition ”

Jaswant Singh's eyes gleamed with delight at the sudden prospect of fresh acquisitions He pondered deeply for a long while and then spoke slowly “Marwar and the Mahratta country are far apart,” he said, “they cannot be ruled by the same monarch ”

“Then, perhaps, a son or relative of yours, worthy of the cause, may assume the kingship , Sivaji will serve under a Kshatriya, he will never raise his sword against a Kshatriya ”

“I can think of no relation of mine who can stand up against Aurangzeb in these perilous times,” he said

“Then employ one of your generals,” said the Brahmin “Sivaji will be perfectly content if Hindu religion and Hindu freedom are preserved He will gladly hand over all power and retire into the solitude of the forest ”

“I have no general who can accomplish this task,” said the Raja

“Then, Maharaja, help the man who can accomplish the task With your assistance and your

blessings the glory of the Hindu religion is assured. Kshatriya Raj ! help a Kshatriya warrior , there is no Hindu in *Bharatvarsha*, there is no God in heaven, who will not bless you for this noble act ”

“There is no answer to your argument” said the Raja, “but Emperor Aurangzeb, out of fondness for me, has entrusted me with a very responsible duty How can I betray the trust ? It would not be honourable ”

“When the Emperor imposed the *jizya* tax upon the Hindus, was his act honourable ? When he destroyed the Hindu temple in Kasi, and with its very stones erected a mosque on the very same site, was his act honourable ?”

“Say no more, noble Brahmin,” exclaimed the Raja, his voice trembling with emotion, “you have said enough From today Sivaji is my friend, and I am Sivaji’s friend , from today my vow and Sivaji’s vow, my task and Sivaji’s task, will be the same Where is that arch-enemy who has been fighting the Emperor all these years ? Where is that *Mahatma* ? I yearn to clasp him to my bosom and dispel my heart’s regret ?”

The Brahmin envoy then cast aside his disguise Under the Brahmin’s turban appeared a warrior’s helmet, under the cotton quilted coat appeared an armour of steel The Mahratta spoke slowly “Maharaj,” he said “I have come to you in

a disguise , forgive me , your servant is not a Brahmin, he is a Mahratta Kshatriya , his name is not Mahadeoji, his name is Sivaji ”

The Raja stared at the renowned Mahratta with an expression of intense amazement and joy , as if fascinated, he continued to gaze at Sivaji, the great enemy of the Emperor of Delhi, and the national hero of the Deccan After a long pause he rose from his seat, and with tears in his eyes he clasped the great enemy to his bosom Sivaji, also, with reverence and affection embraced the renowned Rajput hero

The interview lasted the whole night A plan of action was arranged, and Sivaji took the Raja's leave to depart Before going he said, “Maharaj, I shall feel grateful if you will keep away from Poona tomorrow, or rather, this evening, on some pretext or other ”

“Why ? Will you make an attempt to recover the place ?”

“No,” answered Sivaji smiling, “a wedding will take place and your presence may hinder the auspicious celebrations ”

“Well, I shall keep away. It is long since the revered Niaya Sastri concluded his sacred studies , does he still remember the sacred rituals of a marriage ceremony ”

“Sufficiently well Sayesta Khan was amazed at my knowledge of the Sastras this evening he

will have occasion to be amazed at my knowledge of something quite different ”

The Raja accompanied Sivaji to the door of the tent “You will carry out what we have agreed upon ?” he said.

“I shall ask my master Sivaji to do so ”

“Yes, I forgot , you will please convey this request to your master,” said the Raja laughing as he entered the tent

CHAPTER VIII

SIVAJI

Sivaji, in the guise of a Brahmin, entered Singhagarh when the first tints of dawn coloured the eastern sky. He took off his turban and long quilted coat, the morning sun flashed on his steel cap and shining armour, a sharp dagger rested near his chest, and his famous sword, "Bhawani," hung by his side. Somewhat short in stature, he was powerfully built, with a massive chest whose muscles could be seen under the armour. Peshwa Mureshwar Trimul welcomed him.

"Bhawani be praised," he cried, "you have at last return safely."

"Your blessings have always protected me from danger," replied Sivaji.

"Is everything arranged?"

"Everything."

"The marriage will be held tonight?"

"Yes, tonight."

"Sayesta Khan has no inkling of our Shrewd Chand Khan suspects nothing?"

"Sayesta Khan is waiting for a proposal of peace from the cowardly Sivaji, and the brave

Chand Khan is sleeping his last sleep , he will never fight again ”

“And Maharaja Jaswant ?”

“He had already been greatly impressed and moved by your letter I found him vacillating, and so I easily gained him over ”

“Bhawani be praised,” exclaimed Muneshwar “A thousand men could not have done what you have done in a single night I tremble to think of the daring task you undertook , but Sivaji ! Sivaji ! don’t undertake such a risk again You are the only hope of the Mahrattas ”

“If I had avoided risks I would be today a mere *jaigirdar*,” said Sivaji “If I am to fear danger, how can I accomplish the great task before me ? Let my whole life bristle with peril if only Goddess Bhawani will bless the Mahrattas with freedom ”

“Noble patriot,” said Mureshwar, “victory will be undoubtedly yours , Bhawani herself will befriend you , but to go alone to the camp of the enemy at midnight in a disguise— ”

“It is not unusual with Sivaji , but indeed I had a narrow escape from a danger of another kind ”

“And what was that ?” asked Mureshwar

“You gave Sanskrit lessons to an ignoramus who can’t even sign his name How did you expect him to recite Sanskrit verses ?”

“Tell me what happened ?”

"Well, in Sayesta Khan's court I forgot nearly all the *slokas* that you taught me "

"And then ?"

"I happened to remember a few lines, and with that I managed to gain my object "

This is the first time we have met Sivaji. We now wish to say a few words about his birth and career. Those of my readers who are familiar with the history of the Mahrattas, may omit the rest of this chapter.

Sivaji was born in the year 1627, and so he was a little over thirty six years of age when our story commences. His father was Shahji, and his grandfather Mallaji. In our first chapter we mentioned the family of Nimbalkar of the district of Fultan. Mallaji had married Dipabai, a sister of Jogpal Rao Naek, who was at the time a leading member of the Nimbalkar family. Being childless for many years, Mallaji solicited the assistance of a Mahomedan *pîr* or saint named Shah Sharif of Ahmadnagar, who touched by his entreaties, offered prayers on behalf of the childless father. Sometime later a boy was born to Mallaji in the womb of Dipabai. He was named Shahji after the Mahomedan saint.

At that time there was a renowned military commander in Ahmadnagar named Jadav Rao. He was in command of a body of ten thousand horse and enjoyed the fruits of an extensive *jaagir*. In 1599,

on the day of the *Holee* festival, Mallaji with his boy Shahji visited Jadav Rao. Shahji was then only five years old, and Jadav Rao's daughter three or four years. The children took to each other and played about together. Pleased with the sight Jadav Rao called his daughter to him and asked, "Will you marry that boy?" and then looking around at the people he added, "What a fine pair they would make." The children were sprinkling red powder on each other, and the guests were enjoying the sight. Mallaji suddenly stood up. "Friends," he said, "remember Jadav Rao's consent to the marriage of these children." They all agreed. Jadav Rao, who belonged to a very high family, never intended that his daughter should marry Shahji. He sat amazed at the trick that Mallaji had played on him and said nothing.

Next day, Jadav Rao invited Mallaji to his place, but the latter sent back word that he would not accept the invitation unless the host agreed to keep his promise. Mallaji did not come. The family pride of Jadav Rao's wife was perhaps higher than that of her husband, and she gave him a piece of her mind for the unfortunate joke he had made about the marriage of their daughter with Mallaji's son. Mallaji, in a rage, went away to reside in a village. There he circulated a rumour that the Goddess Bhawani had appeared before him in person, and had made a gift of an

enormous quantity of wealth to him. There is a tradition among the Mahrattas that on that occasion the Goddess had said "Mallaji, a king will be born in your family. He will possess the virtues of Sambhu, he will drive out the enemies of the Brahmins and of sacred temples, and will establish a well-ordered government throughout the Mahratta country. He will found a new era which will commence with his reign, and his descendants, up to the seventh generation, will rule the land."

Whatever the truth of the legend may be, there is no doubt that Mallaji about this time came into possession of a large quantity of money. With this he made a strenuous effort for self-advancement, and he was substantially helped by Jog Pal, his wife's brother. Within a short time he came to be appointed a commander of five thousand horse under the Sultan of Ahmadnagar, and received the title of Raja Bhonsla together with the charge of the fortresses of Suvarni and Chakan and the surrounding country. Poona and Sopanagar were also handed over to be held by him as *jaagir*. Jadav Rao's scruples about a matrimonial alliance with the family of Mallaji now naturally disappeared. In 1604 the marriage between Shahji and Jiji was celebrated with great pomp and ceremony. The Sultan of Ahmadnagar was himself present at the wedding. Shahji was

then only ten years old. In course of time when Mallaji, died he inherited his father's *jaagir* together with his rank and status.

About this time Emperor Akbar commenced a war against Ahmadnagar to bring that kingdom under his subjection. Akbar achieved some measure of success, and after his death the policy was continued by his successor, Jahangeer. During this war Shahji was an officer under Malik Ambar, who commanded the forces of Ahmadnagar, and in 1620 he earned great distinction for his gallantry in a fight against the Moghuls. Later, he changed sides. After Jahangeer's death Emperor Shah Jahan appointed him commander of five thousand horse and made a gift of numerous *jaagirs* to him. But royal favours are ephemeral. Within three years Shah Jahan took away some of the lands, and Shahji, irritated at this act of injustice, went over to the Sultan of Bijapur whom he continued to serve to the day of his death.

During his period of service under Ahmadnagar, which, however, was doomed, Shahji had fought valiantly against the imperial troops. The Sultan unfortunately fell into the hands of the enemy. Shahji placed another member of the royal family on the throne, established a well-ordered government throughout the land, and with the assistance of a number of wise and learned Brahmins he continued to administer the kingdom.

He took over a large number of fortresses and collected large forces in the name of the sultan

Shah Jahan was seriously vexed by the news of these operations. He sent a large force of foot and horse to crush Shahji. It was not possible for Shahji to resist the imperial power, and after a few years of fighting peace was made. In 1637 Ahmadnagar ceased to exist as an independent kingdom. Shahji, as a commanding officer and *jaigirdar* under the Sultan of Bijapur, conquered many parts of Karnat. He thus acquired for himself as much *jaigir* lands in Karnat in the south as he possessed in the neighbourhood of Poona to the north of Bijapur.

Shahji had two sons by his wife Jiji Bai, Sambhuji and Sivaji. According to an ancient Hindu tradition, Jadav Rao, the father of Jiji Bai, was descended from the royal house of Devgarh. If this be true, Sivaji had the blood of the Hindu kings in his veins. In 1630 Shahji married a second wife named Tuka Bai. Deeply offended by this act, Jiji Bai left her husband and took up her residence in the *jaigir* of Poona with her son Sivaji. Shahji continued to live in Karnat with Tuka Bai. He had a son by her who was named Venakaji.

Shahji had two very trusty officers. Of these, Dadaji Kanai Dev was entrusted with the *jaigir* of

Poona, and he undertook the protection and maintenance of Jiji Bai and her son

Sivaji was born in 1627 in the fortress of Suvarni. This place is about fifty miles north of Poona. Shahji married Tuka Bai, and the separation from Jiji Bai occurred when Sivaji was three years old. Jiji and her child came to Poona and lived under the care of Dadaji Kanai Dev. The latter built a large house in Poona for their residence. This was the house which Sayesta Khan occupied after the Moghuls had acquired Poona.

The mother and child continued to stay there. Sivaji received his instructions from Dadaji himself. He never learnt to sign his name, but at an early age he acquired great skill in horsemanship, in archery, and the use of the dagger. The Mahrattas are excellent riders, but even amongst them Sivaji as a rider, was pre-eminent. By such training and physical exercise he developed a powerful frame.

But he did not confine his interest to arms alone. During his leisure hours he would love to sit at the feet of Dadaji Kanai Dev and listen to the tales of heroism and gallantry from the great epics—the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. These tales awoke within him a spirit of daring, strengthened his love for the Hindu religion, and inspired an yearning to emulate the deeds of the ancient heroes. He developed a strong dislike for the

Moslems, whom he regarded as enemies of his religion. His love for the ancient tales was so great that even after he had acquired wealth and a kingdom, he was known to travel great distances, face perils and hardship, to be present at public gatherings where these tales were staged and recited.

Thus, under the care of Dadaji, Sivaji at an early age developed a deep love for the Hindu religion and a strong dislike for the Mahomedans, and when he was sixteen he began to form plans of becoming an independent *poligar* in his own country. He collected round him young men, inspired by the same spirit as himself, and in their company would roam through the hilly region of Konkan. He made himself familiar with the hills and fortresses in this part of the country, and acquired intimate knowledge of the various paths leading to these fortresses, their respective strength, and their means of attack and defence. He spent days together in the hills and valleys and thus acquired minute and intimate knowledge of the terrain. He then began to make plans for storming some of these fortresses.

Sivaji's talk and his mode of life alarmed old Dadaji. He gave a great deal of advice to turn the youth from the dangerous course he had set before himself, and to direct his thoughts to the management and improvement of the extensive

jaigirs of which he was in possession. But the seed of ambition, which had been planted in the heart of Sivaji, could not be eradicated. Sivaji regarded Dadaji as a father, but he was resolved not to abandon the path he had chosen for himself.

Sivaji developed a strong attachment for the Mawalis because of their trustworthiness and their power to endure hardship, and among his friends the staunchest were three Mawalis, Yasaji Kanka, Tannaji Malasri and Baji Fasalkar. It was with the help of these three men that in 1646 Sivaji seduced the warder of Torna and took possession of the fortress. We have already mentioned this fortress in the beginning of our narrative. Sivaji achieved this, his first success, when he was only nineteen. In the following year he built a new fortress on a high hill, about three miles to the south of Torna, and named it Raigarh.

The Sultan of Bijapur, learning of these transactions, sent a strong protest to Shahji asking the reason, for these hostile operations. Shahji, the trusted officer of Bijapur, who had been completely in the dark until now as to the doings of Sivaji, made inquiries about the matter from Dadaji Kanai Dev. The latter sent for Sivaji. He explained to him that the course he was following was bound to lead to disaster, and the wiser plan would be to follow in the footsteps of his father,

who under the Sultan of Bijapur had been able to amass a vast fortune in land and money and attain a lofty rank and social position Sivaji regarded Kana Dev as his father, he tried to lighten his fears by sweet words but kept to the resolution he had formed. Shortly after this incident Dadaji died. Before his death he sent for Sivaji again. The latter went to him fully prepared for a further rebuke, but what he heard filled him with wonder and amazement. In his deathbed the old man seemed to have acquired a prophetic sight, he received his ward with great tenderness and said: "My boy, the task you have undertaken is noble, there is no nobler task in this world. Follow the great path you have chosen, liberate your country; protect the Brahmin, the farmer, the cattle, punish those who desecrate holy temples, follow the lofty ideal which Goddess Ishani has pointed to you." The old man then closed his eyes and woke no more.

The prophetic words of the old man filled Sivaji's heart with fresh hope and enthusiasm. He was twenty years at the time.

The same year Sivaji acquired the fortresses of Chakan and Khandana by bribes to the gatekeepers. He changed the name of Khandana to Singhagarh. We have mentioned this fortress earlier in our story. Bajji Sopa, the brother of Sivaji's step-mother Tuka Bai, had been entrusted

with the care of this fortress Sivaji with his Mawali soldiers suddenly attacked this fortress at midnight and took possession of it. No harm was done to his uncle, who was sent back to his father in Karnat. Shortly after this, the master of the fortress of Purandar died. A quarrel broke out between his sons. Sivaji took advantage of this, and on the pretext of assisting two of the younger brothers, he acquired the fortress for himself. This treacherous conduct roused the wrath of all the three brothers, but Sivaji appeased them by revealing the noble object he had in view and supplicating their support for the attainment of that object. Impressed by his words, and realizing the greatness of his design, all the three brothers agreed to join Sivaji and serve under him.

In this manner Sivaji acquired a large number of fortresses. It is not necessary to burden our narrative with their names. In 1648 Abaji Swarna Dev, one of Sivaji's commanding officers, acquired the fortress of Kalyan and the entire district of Kalyan. The Sultan of Bijapur was extremely annoyed at these hostile proceedings, and retaliated by putting Shahji in prison. The latter was kept in a small room built of stone, and was told that if Sivaji did not submit within a specified time, the only door to that room would be walled up. Sivaji managed to save his father's life by interceding with the Emperor, but the

imprisonment continued for a period of four years

Sivaji made every attempt to obtain the support of Chandra Rao, the Raja of Jauli, for the purpose of destroying the Moslem power. He did not succeed. He thereupon compassed the death of the raja and his brother by their own men and captured their fortress by a night attack. He thus acquired the entire kingdom of Jauli, and in the same year he built a new fortress and named it Pratapgarh. Two years later, he invested Mureshwar Trimul Pingali with the title of Peshwa, and recruited a large force for the conquest of Konkan.

The Sultan of Bijapur now made a determined attempt to destroy Sivaji. In 1659 he sent Afzal Khan, a noted general, with five thousand horse and seven thousand foot to achieve his object. The latter boastfully announced that he would return with Sivaji in chains.

It was not possible to resist such a force and so, Sivaji made a proposal of peace. Afzal Khan sent a Brahmin named Gopinath to Sivaji. A meeting took place in the presence of councillors near the fortress of Pratapgarh, and many matters were discussed. Accommodation was arranged for Gopinath for the night.

In the evening Sivaji came over to interview Gopinath. The Mahratta leader possessed the

power of persuasion in a remarkable degree, and he addressed himself to the task of gaining over the Brahmin. "You are a Brahmin," he said, "you are my superior, but please listen to me. All my efforts have been directed on behalf of the Hindu race and Hindu religion, and Goddess Bhawani herself has exhorted me to protect the Brahmin, to preserve the cattle, to punish those who desecrate our gods and our holy temples and to fight the enemies of our religion. You are a Brahmin, obey the order of Bhawani, help me to achieve the purpose of the Goddess, and you will live happily among your own people." Gopinath was pleased, he agreed to assist Sivaji. They decided that in order to achieve their object it would be necessary for Sivaji to meet Afzal Khan.

A few days later the meeting took place near the fortress of Pratapgarh. Afzal Khan's troops remained some distance from the fortress, and the Moslem general went to the appointed place in a *palki* or litter accompanied by a single body-guard. That morning Sivaji performed his devotions and holy ablutions with particular care. He placed his head on the feet of his mother and prayed for her blessings. He wore a steel cap under his turban and armour under his long quilted coat. He came out of the fortress, and in the company of Tannaji Malasri he met Afzal Khan. As they embraced each other, Sivaji's sharp knife struck the Moslem

general and felled him Sivaji's attendant overpowered Afzal Khan's body-guard After this incident Sivaji captured many fortresses and pillaged the entire countryside up to the very gates of Bijapur

The war with Bijapur continued for another three years with no definite result In 1662 peace was made through the mediation of Shahji Sivaji displayed great filial respect when his father came to see him He dismounted from his steed and accorded him a welcome suited to a monarch He walked alongside the *palki* or litter, that carried his father, and refrained from taking a seat in his presence Shahji stayed with his son a few days and returned well pleased to Bijapur where he negotiated a treaty of peace between the Sultan and Sivaji Sivaji kept true to the terms arranged, and during the life time of Shahji there was no further war After that, when war broke out, Sivaji was not the aggressor

Peace was made in the year 1662 In the same year, as mentioned earlier, war commenced with the Moghuls, and our story also begins from this point of time The whole of Konkan was now under Sivaji, who possessed a force of seven thousand horse and fifty thousand foot. Sivaji was at this time thirty five years of age

CHAPTER IX

PERFORMANCE OF THE AUSPICIOUS CEREMONY

The sun is near setting The troops within the fortress of Singhagarh are silently making their preparations , in fact, everything is being done so quietly that men outside have no inkling of what is passing within the fortress

A number of soldiers have taken their stand on an elevated spot within the fortress The view of the surrounding country from this high position is indeed very beautiful On the east flows the river Nira, meandering through a green valley, bright with the flowers and fresh leaves of the spring On the north lies a flat plain, stretching away with its rich harvest of green corn shimmering in the sunlight In the far distance, sprawling on the plain, is the town of Poona The eyes of the men are fixed on this object, and their thoughts on the great event to be enacted there that very night They cast their eyes to the south and the west Tall numberless hills, vast mountain chains to the limits of visibility, shrouded in mist, or glowing in the rays of the setting sun, are displayed before them But

the beauties of nature have no appeal for these men, their thoughts are concentrated on a matter wholly different

A decisive conflict, a daring venture, which may suddenly yield the long-desired fruit or destroy forever all hope of success makes the strongest heart pause and hesitate. Sayesta Khan's guard shall be destroyed, or the Mahratta sun may set for ever, this was the thought that gripped the minds of these war-hardened soldiers. Nobody spoke, but their inner thoughts were revealed in their glances. With just twenty or twenty five men Sivaji proposed a raid on the enemy. It was doubtful whether the Mahratta hero had ever before handled such a desperate venture. Is it surprising that the brow of the boldest should for a moment darken?

The clear-brained Mureshwar Peshwa was with these men. During his early years he had fought in the army of Shahji, but later, he transferred his allegiance to Sivaji and built for him the excellent fortress of Pratapgarh. For four years he had discharged the duties of a peshwa and had thoroughly proved his worthiness for the important post. When Sivaji killed Afzal Khan, it was he who had overpowered his guard, and later, when the war with the Moghuls commenced he took charge of the Mahratta infantry. Brave in fight, calm in peril, wise and far-sighted in counsel,

Mureshwar was certainly the most efficient soldier that Sivaji possessed

There was another in that group who understood the technique of war and possessed a clear vision. This was the Brahmin, Nilapanta Swarna Dev, popularly known as Abaji Swarna Dev. In 1648 he had stormed the fortress of Kalyan and acquired for Sivaji the entire district of Kalyani, and recently he had commenced the building of the well-known fortress of Raigarh.

The famous Annaji Datta was also present in Singhagarh that day. Four years ago he had acquired Pabangarh, and was now one of Sivaji's most important and efficient officers.

Nitaji, who was in command of the Mahratta horse, was not present in Singhagarh. In the war council of Sayesta Khan, the reader may remember, Chand Khan had described how this man had made a powerful raid on Aurangabad and Ahmadnagar. There was a small body of cavalry stationed at Singhagarh at the time under a subordinate officer, Kartaji Gujar.

In an earlier part of this story mention was made of three Mawalis, who had been friends of Sivaji from their childhood days. Of these, Bajji Fasalkar had lost his life three years ago, and the other two Tannaji Malasri and Yasaji Kanka were present in the fortress. The boyhood friendship, the youthful courage, were still there, and they

loved Sivaji as they loved their own lives. Hundreds of times in the dead of night had they scaled silent hills in the company of Sivaji, and with their Mawali following surprised the enemy and taken his fortresses by storm.

The sun has set, the evening shadows are descending in layers upon the world, the men are still waiting on the peak of the fortress, when Sivaji arrives. Grim determination and fierce daring are written on his features. His armour and weapons are hidden under his clothes. He is ready for the desperate night's adventure. His gaze is steady, resolute, unshaken.

"Everything is ready, friends," he said slowly, "give me leave to depart."

"You have decided not to allow Swarna Dev, Annaji or me to go with you," said Mureshwar. "When have you ever faced peril without us?"

"Peshwa, please forgive me," said Sivaji. "Please do not persist, your courage, your strength, your wisdom, I know and I cherish, but forgive me, if I cannot accede to your wish. I have taken a solemn oath by the command of Bhawani; I will accomplish this task myself or fling away a futile life. Give me your blessings for success, but if evil come and I lose my life in the enterprise, three staunch men will remain to maintain unimpaired the strength of the Mahrattas, their

far-sighted wisdom and devotion will protect and save the motherland At this time of parting cease your entreaty "

The peshwa realized that farther pleading was useless , he remained silent

"Mureshwar," said Sivaji, addressing the peshwa in a low voice, "you have served under my father, you are like my own father , I seek your blessings for the success of the enterprise tonight The blessings of a Brahmin must bear fruit Abaji, Annaji," he continued addressing the other two men, "give me your blessings also before I go " With tears in their eyes they blessed him

Sivaji turned to Tannaji and Yasaji "Friends of my childhood," he said, "give me your good wishes "

They remained speechless for grief After a while Tannaji spoke "Master," he said "what fault have we committed that you should refuse to take us with you ? There have been many night adventures before, many fortresses have been stormed , who were your associates ? Recall the old days , your excursions through Konkan, through wild gorges, along river banks, into dark caves and to the lofty mountain peaks, sleeping together and dreaming of plans of conquests who were your companions ? Yasaji, the dead Baji, and your servant, Tannaji Baji lost his life in the discharge

of his duty , we look forward to nothing higher , give us leave to accompany our master to-night If success crown our adventure, the joy of our master will be our joy , if disaster come, what is our life worth ? We have not the wisdom to guide the destiny of our people O, do not disappoint the friends of your childhood ”

There were tears in Tannaji's eyes Sivaji, deeply moved, embraced his friends “Brothers,” he said, “there is nothing I can deny you, get ready quick ”

They rushed down There, they saw troops drawn up and ready for action like dark rain clouds at sunset Sivaji entered the inner apartments His mother was seated alone, pensive, offering her prayers for the safety of her son in the night's adventure “Mother,” said Sivaji approaching her, “give me your blessings before I go ” In a voice full of tenderness Jiji said “Come my child, let me embrace you Ah, when will your troubles cease ? When will the cares of this sorrowing woman cease ?”

“Mother,” said Sivaji, “your blessings have always protected me from peril , they have given me victory in my wars ”

“My child,” said the mother, “may you live long , may Ishani protect you from harm ” Tenderly she placed her hands on his head, while her tears fell on her shrunken bosom

Sivaji had said good bye to all whom he loved dearly. His eyes and voice had hitherto kept their composure, but now he could contain his feelings no longer. In a voice trembling with emotion he said "O my beloved mother, you are my Ishani, may I always adore you with my deepest devotion. your grace and blessings will drive away all perils from me."

Copious tears fell from her eyes. "My child," she said, "achieve victory for the Hindu religion, and the God of Gods, Sambhu himself, will befriend you. My ancestors were kings of Devgarh, they were the pillars of the Hindu faith. My beloved son, I bless you, may you be the king of the Mahrattas, may you be a pillar of strength of the Hindu religion."

Sivaji wiped his eyes and slowly left the room.

The troops were ready. Sivaji mounted his steed, and with his men silently passed through the gate of the fortress. As he was going out a young soldier approached and bowed to him. Sivaji recognized him. "Raghunathji Havildar, what do you want?" he asked.

"Sire, you may remember the day when I brought you letters and the message from the Goddess from the fortress of Torna. You were pleased with what I did and promised me a reward."

"Is this the time, when I am about to handle a critical venture, to ask for your reward?"

"The reward I ask for is that I may be allowed to participate in this venture. You will enter Poona with twenty-five men, I ask your leave, sire, to accompany the party."

"Why do you wish to face the peril? Why do you wish to lose your life when you are so young?"

"Sire," said Raghunath, "I do not fear I shall lose my life when I am with you, and if I do, I have no one in the world to mourn for me. If I can please my master in the discharge of my duty and come back alive, then only have I a happy future before me."

His dark clustering hair fell over his brow and jet black eyes, his frank youthful countenance revealed the firm resolve of a soldier. Sivaji was pleased at the words and the youthful appearance of Raghunath, he gave him the permission he asked for. Raghunath bowed and leapt on his steed.

Soldiers guarded the entire route from Singa-garh to Poona. In the darkness of the evening Sivaji stationed his men at different points along the road. A single light, or the slightest sound, might warn the guard in Poona, and so with the utmost precaution in darkness and silence he made the necessary disposition of his troops.

The task was successfully accomplished. The night spread a heavy shadow over the world. Sivaji, in the company of Tannaji and Yasaji, with

SIVAJI

his twenty-five chosen Mawalis approached Poona and lay concealed in a large orchard near the town. Raghunath followed his master like his shadow.

Complete darkness filled the mango grove, the cool evening breeze in gentle waves stirred the leaves, belated way-farers from time to time passed by the side of the grove towards the town, darkness was all they saw, the rustle of leaves was all they heard.

Gradually, the distant hum of the town died down, the distant lights faded out, an occasional call of the distant watchman or the cry of the jackal came floating on the breeze.

A sound of bells. Sivaji's heart fluttered. He looked in the direction of the sound. It was somewhere within the intricate lanes of the town, and nothing could be seen from outside.

Again a sound of bells, he looked again. A crowd of men with lights and music were coming along the stone-paved street. This was the bridal party.

The procession approached Poona. It was not walled round and so everything could be seen. The road was filled with men, and the music made a loud noise. There were many mounted men, but most of the crowd were proceeding on foot.

Sivaji silently embraced his old friends Tannaji and Yasaji. They looked at each other. Perhaps

this was their last farewell. This was the feeling that found expression in their eyes, words were not necessary. Silently Sivaji and his men joined the procession and mingled with the crowd.

They passed near the residence of Sayesta Khan. The ladies of his household came to the windows and watched the gay throng. The procession passed, and the ladies retired for the night. About thirty men of the party remained behind concealed near the Khan Saheb's residence. Nobody detected them. The noise of the bridal procession gradually died away.

The night grew darker still. At a window in the wall of the cook room there was a continuous whispering sound. Some of the women-folk had fallen asleep and others were on the borderland of sleep, they heard and yet did not hear the sound.

A brick moved, then another, and then another, there was a noise of falling sand. Some of the women suspecting something wrong came to the spot. Through an opening in the wall a man crept in, then another, and then a third. Like a string of ants armed men kept crawling into the building. The women shrieked, they rushed into Sayesta Khan's room and apprised him of the attack.

Sivaji supplicating for peace. This was the soothing dream that floated through the brain of

Sayesta Khan He awoke with a start Sivaji had attacked the town and entered his house, he heard

He rushed to a door It was guarded by an armed Mahratta soldier He rushed to another, that too was guarded In a state of trepidation he closed all the doors and made for a window While he was preparing to escape he heard a great roar and a shout of "Hara, Hara, Mahadeo" and the enemy poured into the adjacent room

"Our town is attacked, the enemy is on us," were the cries that resounded on all sides The guard was taken by surprise In the confusion many were killed and wounded, and the rest rushed to the assistance of their master and surrounded the twenty five men who had made the attack

Terrific shouts and cries filled the building, lamps were blown out, and in the darkness, with devilish shrieks the Mawalis continued their fight The fight continued in darkness The banging of doors, the exulting shouts of the aggressors, the cries and groans of the wounded resounded through the mansion Sivaji, spear in hand, leaped upon the enemy, his men responded with a shout of "Hara Hara Mahadeo", the Moslem guards were killed and wounded, and those that remained fled With a terrific spear-blow Sivaji broke down a door and entered the room of Sayesta Khan

A number of Moghuls rushed into the room to save their master. In the forefront was the brave Sham Sher Khan, the son of the dead Chand Khan. His father, shamed and insulted by his master, had given his life for him, the son none the less was prepared to do the same, and took his place in front of the defending party. Sivaji paused for a moment. Lowering his sword he said, "Young man, my hands are still red with the blood of your father, I will not take your life, move out of my way."

Sham Sher made no reply. His eyes blazed, and before Sivaji could defend himself, he saw the gleaming sword of the assailant above his head.

For a moment he abandoned all hope of life and muttered the name of Goddess Bhawani. A spear suddenly flashed from behind, and he saw his assailant Sham Sher Khan fall and roll on the floor. He looked back. Raghunath was standing behind him.

"Havildar," said Sivaji, "I shall always remember this." With these words he made his way forward.

The delay enabled Sayesta Khan to escape through a window by means of a rope. A number of Mawalis were near the window. One of them struck and severed a finger of Sayesta Khan. The latter without looking back made his escape. His son, Abdul Fateh Khan, and the

guard had been slaughtered. The rooms, verandahs, courtyards, were streaming with blood, dead bodies lay all round, the lofty halls resounded with the cries of women, Mawalis rushed about from room to room in search of the enemy. The glimmering torch lights revealed terrible sights of dead bodies, severed heads and streams of flowing blood all about the place. Sivaji now called his men. He was averse to useless slaughter after a successful fight and always took pains to stop it.

"We have achieved our task," he said, cowardly Sayesta Khan will fight us no more, let us hasten back to Singhagarh."

With his men he made his way out of Poona in the darkness without difficulty, and hastened towards Singhagarh. After proceeding about four miles he gave orders to light the torches. Innumerable torches were lighted, and Sayesta Khan, from his shelter in Poona, saw the small party of raiders reach their fortress in safety.

The following day the Moghuls made an attack on Singhagarh, but were driven back by the cannon of the defenders, and chased some distance by the Marhatta cavalry under Kartaji Gujar.

A reverse for a brave man is an incentive for further exertion, but Sayesta Khan was not a man of that stamp. He sent a report to Emperor Aurangzeb explaining the unfortunate incident.

as due to the inefficiency of his own troops and the treachery of Jaswant Singh, who had been won over, he said, by a bribe. Aurangzeb recalled both these men whom he regarded as thoroughly inefficient and sent his own son, Sultan Moazzim, to take command of the army in the Deccan. Later, he sent Jaswant Singh to strengthen the southern army.

For a year after this event nothing sensational occurred. In the beginning of 1664 Shahjī died. Sivajī performed the funeral rites of his father and other religious ceremonies in Singhagarh, and then proceeded to Raigarh. There, he assumed the title of Raja and minted coins stamped with his own name. We shall now take leave of the new monarch.

Reader, it is long since we visited the fortress of Torna. Let us take this opportunity of going back and getting the news of the place.

CHAPTER X

HOPE

Raghunath had experienced a thrill of deep emotion the day he visited the fortress of Torna. There was also another who had experienced the impact of a new feeling, the surge of a girl's first love. Her gaze had been caught by the appearance of the young soldier in the garden that evening. She had looked again, and the picture of the youth with a frank, open countenance in a military uniform was still there. She had then slowly walked in-doors.

During his evening meal she was by his side. She had gazed upon that god-like form, but when their eyes met she had blushed and silently moved away.

She moved away, but a new emotion had caught her soul. He had gazed at her with such feeling in his eyes. In that look was there a touch of tenderness for a girl from his own country?

On the following day, when she saw him again, the same feeling gripped her more firmly. She had thrilled at his touch, and an exquisite joy had flooded her being when he had placed the necklace round her neck and heard the glad notes of

his voice From her window she had watched the young soldier mount his steed and ride away

She remained standing by the window a long while Man and horse passed out of her sight, but with fixed eyes she gazed into the distance A vast picture of mountain ranges was visible in the sunlight, with their tall trees waving in the breeze, like the billows of an open sea, and fading away to the sky Nature's fountains glistening among the hills, united their waters and formed a mountain stream Down below in the valley flowed the placid stream through peaceful green fields dotted with tiny cottages The unclouded sun rolled down its light in waves over the lovely landscape But Sarayu's eyes were not upon the picture, her soul was not drawn by the beauty of the exquisite landscape

She remained absent-minded the whole day She sat by her father during his evening meal, made his bed and retired to her room In the hush of the night she went to her window, sat down and gazed into the silent night lighted by a clear moon

CHAPTER XI

DREAMS

Janardan Dev, the priest of the temple of Torna, was by nature simple-minded and employed his time mostly with his sacred books and in prayers. He paid a daily visit to the fortress gate morning and evening, but occasionally remained at home. He was very fond of Sarayu, and would always have her by his side during his meals. In the evening, sometimes he would entertain her with tales from the ancient *Sastras*, but most of his time he devoted to his own duties. How could he know of the new feeling that had taken possession of her heart?

Emotions fade. The wave of feeling passed away within a few days leaving a tender memory of the young soldier she had met. Sarayu had been without a companion from her childhood, and the only person she had learnt to love was her foster father. She knew nobody else, and so from her childhood she developed a calm, peaceful, and pensive nature. The picture of the young soldier would wake in her mind occasionally in the morning or evening or at dead of night.

Dreams Seated alone by her window of an evening or strolling in the garden in the moonlight, so many thoughts filled her soul. He was now in the thick of battle, he was storming a fortress and destroying the enemy, he was winning the honours of a hero by his prowess and valour. Did he sometimes think of the lonely girl? A man's mind is always engaged with his duties, his cares, his griefs, his joys. His life is full of hopes, some of which are fulfilled, others not. The royal court, the battle-field, the home of sorrow, entertainments and duties,—these engage his mind, his time. One single thought cannot hold his mind, but still an illusory hope would whisper in her ears, "the young soldier sometimes thinks of you."

Again a doubt. Does the young soldier ever think of the fortress of Torna? At his age amidst daily distractions can his heart remain steadfast and true? Alas, the rising tide toys with the flower on the river bank, the flower leaps up with joy, but the tide passes away and leaves it to wither. The water never returns. Still an illusory hope would whisper in her ears, "some day perhaps the young soldier may come back to you."

When the castle and the girdling hills reposed in the moonlight, the deep blue sky and the white moon would fill her soul with dreams. She would see a young horseman approaching the fortress

The steed is snow-white, the rider is fair, his flowing locks shade a noble brow and a pair of lustrous eyes. He arrives at the castle and dismounts. A golden helmet crowns his head, gold bands decorate his powerful arms, his right hand grips a tall spear. He sits down to his meal and she is by his side, he comes to the garden again in the evening, and she stands bashfully beside him, with a joy in his heart he tells her the tales of his wars.

Dream, dreams, following each other like the waves of the sea, an endless stream of dreams. The war has ended. He is crowned with glory, but he still remembers Sarayu. Her foster father has consented to their union, the hall is full of guests, bright lights glitter on all sides, music and songs fill the air, a confused splendour of jubilation obscures the vision. She sits veiled beside his god-like figure, she places her moist trembling hand in his, that evening she wins a god incarnate, her whole being thrills with a wild joy. Sarayu ! Sarayu !

Dreams, dreams. No, Raghunath is without glory and honour. He is poor, but she is his wife. She has a small cottage among the clustering cottages by the placid stream in the broad green valley below on which the moonlight rests. In the evening she prepares a homely meal for him and sits on the green grass with her eyes gazing

into the distance, awaiting his return She sees him coming after the day's work , her heart leaps within her , he comes to her and places another necklace round her neck , an exquisite joy seizes her Sarayu ! Sarayu !

Months pass and draw the year to a close but the dreams continue The god-like form of the smiling youth is always before her eyes,—the tall youth who placed a sweet necklace round her neck The dreams continue Are they mere dreams ?

CHAPTER XII

THEY MEET AGAIN

No, they are not mere dreams Sarayu Bala's imagination has not lied, her hopes have not played her false

We find her one evening gathering flowers in her garden Prompted by her thoughts she gazes from time to time at the necklace she is wearing She is as bright and sweet as ever, her looks feature loveliness and tranquility Yet the lapse of a year has made a change in her appearance, a new hope, a new joy has imparted a fresh splendour to her lovely countenance Her eyes are bright with a new lustre, her whole being is radiant with a new grace, a new impulse Her heart, her mind, her form, have changed, she is no longer a child, her step is on the ladder of fresh youth Imaginative and beautiful, with golden youth as her companion, we find her gathering flowers and casting her glance from time to times at the necklace on her bosom

A young Rajput soldier dismounts from his steed near the gate Her eyes turn in that direction, a thrill passes through her being, her glance remains immovably fixed on him He sees her in

the garden, the beautiful Rajput girl whom he had met one evening in the same garden, and whose exquisite loveliness had held him spell-bound. The next morning he had placed a string of corals and pearls round her neck. On the battlefield, in the thick of peril, in camp among the troops, her image would rise before his eyes, and in the night sweet dreams of that beautiful form would fill his soul, he sees her again, that vision of supreme loveliness, with her smiling face rosy with the blush of joy. For a while he stands speechless and amazed.

O moon, shower your beams of nectar on Raghunath and Sarayu. A silent watcher through lovely nights, many charming scenes have you witnessed but never such as this. When virgin love meets youth and fills the young heart with a divine flame, and like moonbeams, rolls its waves of extatic joy through the human soul, and the world is saturated, and earth and heaven flooded with its influence, then indeed, Paradise descends upon this world. For a while she waits there bending down her head, enters the temple and apprises her foster father of the arrival of Raghunath. Janardan Dev greets and welcomes Sivaji's messenger with great respect and joy.

In the evening Raghunath sat with the priest and imparted to him all the news he possessed. He told him of the discomfiture of Sayesta Khan

and his return to Delhi, of the Sivaji's assumption of kingship in Raigarh, and the excellent arrangement he had made to administer the country. But Sivaji was perturbed at the news that the Emperor had sent Jai Singh, the powerful monarch of Ambar, to subdue him. The Mahratta monarch is hopeful of making terms with Ambar and in this connexion he is anxious to meet Janardan Dev, the learned priest whose native land is Ambar. Arrangement had been made for his journey, and it was his master's wish that Janardan should leave for Raigarh with Raghunath in a few days if he could make it convenient to do so.

Sarayu was making arrangements for the evening meal on one side of the room, and it is needless to state that she heard every word that was uttered. They would go to the capital of the Mahratta kingdom and Raghunath would accompany them. This thought made her heart dance with joy, the waterpot dropped from her hand, thrilled to the bone and covered with blushes she left the room.

A long conversation followed between Janardan Dev and Raghunath. The latter talked about his home, his people, gave an account of his family, and spoke to the priest as his father. Janardan was very pleased to learn of the noble ancestry of Raghunath, which was visible in

his distinguished appearance, his courage, his respectful bearing, and he felt like a father to him. The evening meal was ready for Raghunath. Janardan rose and with great joy embraced him.

"Now come and take your meal," he said. "I am very pleased to learn of your ancestry. I know your family of which you are a worthy scion. I have regarded Sarayu as my daughter, and from today I shall regard you as my son, and if, after the war is over, I am fortunate enough to place Sarayu in your hands, I shall die contented and happy. May God Almighty keep you both happy."

Raghunath's eyes filled with tears. Slowly he bowed down to the feet of the holy man and said, "Father give your blessings so that this poor soldier may be able to fulfil your heart's desire. Raghunath is today only a havildar, without rank, wealth or fame, but may he have your blessings, and may God help him to be worthy of the priceless jewel he will seek to win."

These words reached Sarayu's ears, her delicate form trembled like a leaf in the wind. He hardly touched his meal and Sarayu was a poor hostess that evening.

CHAPTER XIII

THE JOURNEY TO RAJGARH

The arrangements for the journey occupied several days, and during this period Raghunath stayed in the residence of the priest. He would see Sarayu pick flowers in the garden morning and evening, and in the middle of the day and in the afternoon he would take the food served by her sweet hands. But during these few days Raghunath could not muster courage to speak to the girl. His heart beat fast whenever he met her, and she would draw her veil and slip away.

When the party left the fortress of Torna a horseman took his place by Sarayu's litter, and in the journey through mountain paths and forests, across treeless fields and along river banks, he remained constantly by her side. And at night, when she rested with her companions in some obscure temple or a way-side shop or a broken-down hut there was the same soldier strolling near with a lance in his hands.

A woman naturally observes and understands these things. A man's kindness, his assiduous care and the impulse of his heart do not remain hidden from her. Sarayu would watch the tireless soldier from her litter, her eyes would light up at

the sight of his god-like form, and intense happiness and love would fill her heart

In the evening, she would attend on him while he sat to his meal, but bashfulness prevented her performing the part of a good hostess. In the morning, she would see him mount his horse and could not easily turn away her eyes from his pale face

After a few days' journey the party arrived at Rajgarh, Janardan Dev halted in a village under the fort. He sent word of his arrival to Sivaji with a request to be allowed to wait on him the following day

The meal was served somewhat late that evening. The priest took light refreshment and retired early. At one *prahar* Sarayu brought in Raghunath's food

After his meal he remained indoors contrary to his usual habit. He hesitated for a while and then with slow steps he went to the spot where Sarayu was seated

Suppressing his feelings he spoke in a steady voice

"Devi," he said, "my duty is accomplished, give me your leave to depart"

Like water to the thirsty, the words fell on eager ears. Her heart leaped within her. Crimson with joy, she stood motionless

Raghunath spoke again. "Devi, give me your leave to depart," he repeated, "tomorrow you will

proceed to the king's palace and the poor soldier will rejoin his duty "

Suppressing her bashfulness she wiped her eyes and answered in a voice full of tenderness. "May God give you success in battle for the care you have bestowed on us, for the trouble you have taken over me , may your ambition be fulfilled What return can we make for all that you have done for us ?"

"I am fortunate," he replied respectfully, "I have been able to bring you to Rajgarh safely If you are pleased with my services my prayer is that you will not forget this poor soldier

She understood him and bent down her head Encouraged by her attitude Raghunath put aside his reserve and spoke more freely "Forgive the poor soldier," he said, "if he has aspired too high Your father looks on me with favour , I trust you will not cast your eyes away from me If by the grace of God I am able to realize my ambition, and my efforts and hopes are crowned with success, I shall reveal my feelings to you , till then think of this poor soldier sometimes "

Humbly he took his leave and departed Her eyes followed him and remained fixed on the path he had taken Who can say what thoughts filled her soul It was midnight She heaved a sigh and murmured, "Noble soldier, you will always live in my dreams , God is my witness "

CHAPTER XIV

JAI SINGH

We have stated before that Aurangzeb recalled Sayesta Khan and Jaswant Singh as they had proved inefficient, and in their place appointed his own son Sultan Moazzim to take charge of the army in the Deccan. Later, he also sent Maharaja Jaswant Singh to assist him. As these men failed to achieve any definite result they were replaced by Jai Singh, the renowned Raja of Ambar, assisted by Dilwar Khan, a famous Afgan noted for his prowess and courage. Towards the end of Chaitra in the year 1665 of the Christian era Jai Singh advanced into the Deccan. Instead of waiting for the enemy like Sayesta Khan, he instructed Dilwar Khan to launch an attack on the fortress of Purandar, and he himself surrounded Singhagarh and advanced to the gates of Raigarh.

Sivaji was averse to a war with a Hindu general, especially as he was fully aware of Jai Singh's reputation as a soldier, the strength of his force which was irresistible, and his capacity as a commander. Aurangzeb had perhaps no general more powerful than him.

Bernier, a French traveller, who visited India

about this time, has left on record his opinion that there was no man in *Bharatvarsha* who possessed the wisdom and the clear intellect of Jai Singh. Sivaji, from the very first, abandoned his accustomed initiative. He sent his envoys again and again to Jai Singh with proposals of peace, but the shrewd Raja placed no faith on them. At last Sivaji's trusted minister, Raghunath Panta Niaya Sastri, arrived as representative of Sivaji and took great pains to explain to the Raja that Sivaji was honestly sincere in the proposals he was making. He was also a Kshatriya, and well understood the honour due to a Kshatriya. Raja Jai Singh believed him. "Noble Brahmin" he said "I am fully satisfied. Tell your master that the Emperor of Delhi is prepared to pardon his rebellious conduct and will receive him with respect and honour. I give you my word. I am a Rajput, and a Rajput's word is never broken."

A few days after this, while Jai Singh was with his ministers at a conference, a sentry entered the tent. "May victory crown your Excellency," he said, "Raja Sivaji has arrived and requests an audience with your Excellency."

Everyone was amazed. Jai Singh rose and went to the door of the tent to receive the renowned visitor. He greeted and embraced him, led him into the tent, and offered him a seat on his *guddy* on his right side.

Sivaji felt duly honoured After a few preliminary words of courtesy Jai Singh said "You have honoured me by coming to my tent , please regard the place as yours own "

"Your humble servant has never failed to obey your command," replied Sivaji "You sent word through Raghunath Panta desiring my presence here, and I am here I am duly honoured by your kindness and courtesy "

"Yes, I remember all I said to Raghunath Panta I shall do all I promised The Emperor of Delhi will pardon you, he will protect you, he will honour you I have given my word that this will be done, and a Rajput never breaks his word "

After a while the conference was dissolved ; the councillors departed, leaving Jai Singh and Sivaji together The smile he had assumed departed from Sivaji's countenance He rested the chin on his hand and seemed engrossed in thought Jai Singh noticed tears in his eyes

"Do you regret, Raja, you have placed yourself in my hands ?" asked Jai Singh "I assure you there is no cause for regret. You have trusted me and delivered yourself to me , a Rajput never belies his trust, he will never lay hands on you Choose any horse from my stables tonight and depart, if you wish You have come safely, you will go back safely , my orders are that no

Rajput shall lay hands on you If I can win the war, so much the better , if I cannot, there will be no regret I shall ever be true to the tradition of Kshatriyas ”

“Maharaj,” replied Sivaji, “I do not regret I have placed myself in the hands of a person like you , my heart is breaking at the thought that I have to abandon the great cause on behalf of the Hindu religion and Hindu glory which I have been trying to achieve from the days of my boyhood But even this I have resolved to do I do not regret ”

“What grieves you then ?”

“Since my boyhood I have sung songs of your glory The songs are true If there is nobleness, truth and sense of duty in this world, they are to be found in the Rajput Will the Rajput submit to the foreigner ? Is Maharaja Jai Singh a commander under Aurangzeb ?

“Kshatriya Raj, this is truly a matter for regret,” said Jai singh, “but the Rajputs did not submit to the foreigner without stubborn resistance They fought against the Emperor of Delhi so long as it was possible, but the decree of fate compelled them to submit Glorious Pratap, the great hero of Mewar, attempted the impossible, and today his descendants pay a tribute to Delhi You are perhaps aware of this ”

“Yes, and that is the reason I ask you how you

can be so eager in the cause of a people who are our eternal enemy," said Sivaji

"When I accepted the command of the imperial army I gave my word that I would spare no pains to achieve the imperial task. What I have promised to do, I shall do."

"Must we always keep our promise? How can there be good faith with those who are enemies of our country and our religion?"

"You are a Kshatriya," said Jai Singh, "and you ask this question? Read the history of the Rajputs, they have fought the Moslems through many centuries, they have never broken their word. They have sometimes achieved success and often suffered reverses, but whether successful or otherwise, in prosperity and in peril, they have always fulfilled their promise. We have no longer the freedom of which we were once so proud, but we still possess the pride of honesty. In our own country and beyond, among friends and enemies alike, the Rajput name is held in high honour. Kshatriya Raj, Todar Mull conquered Bengal, Man Singh carried the imperial flag of victory from Kabul to Orissa, they never belied their trust, they fulfilled their promise to the Emperor. Mahratta Raj, the word of a Kshatriya is more solemn than a treaty of peace, many treaties have been broken, but the word of a Kshatriya has never been broken."

"Maharaj Jaswant Singh is a stalwart pillar of the Hindu faith," said Sivaji. "He refused to take arms against the Hindus on behalf of the Mahomedans."

"Jaswant Singh is renowned for his valour and he is a pillar of the Hindu faith, there is no doubt about that. His kingdom of Marwar is in a desert, and his soldiers are perhaps the hardest and the bravest in the world. If Jaswant, protected by his desert, and with the aid of his brave soldiers had fought for the independence of the Hindus, I would have nothing but praise for him. If he had proved victorious and hoisted the flag of victory in Delhi, I would have acknowledged him as Emperor. Or, if defeated, he had sacrificed his life in the desert for the cause of his country and his religion, I would have worshipped him as a god. But the day he accepted the command of the Delhi army he promised to fulfil the trust that was committed to him. After accepting a trust, to belie it, was not worthy of a Kshatriya. By this act he has tarnished his reputation. Since his defeat on the banks of the Sipra he nourished a grudge against Aurangzeb, otherwise he could never be guilty of such a shameful act."

Shrewd Sivaji realized that Jai Singh was not Jaswant Singh. After a pause he spoke, "Is it a shameful act to strive for the advancement of

Hindu religion or to regard a Hindu as his brother and assist him ?”

“I do not say that,” replied Jai Singh “Why didn’t Jaswant Singh resign his service openly before God and man before making an alliance with you ? Why did he not strive for Hindu independance in the manner that you are doing ? To have acted against his sovereign in secret while still in his service was treachery Kshatriya Raj, a treacherous act is unworthy of a Kshatriya ”

“If he had joined me openly, the Emperor would have appointed some other general in command of the army, and very probably both of us would have been defeated and killed ”

“Death in battle is an honour for the Kshatriya, treachery a dishonour ”

Sivaji’s face crimsoned “Rajput,” he said, “the Mahratta also has no fear of death If by the sacrifice of this poor life of mine I could achieve my object of Hindu independence and Hindu glory, I would rend my bosom with a knife this very moment , or take your spear, brave Rajput, and strike into my heart, and I shall die with a smile on my face But it causes me intense agony to think that I must abandon all hope of Hindu glory, of Hindu freedom, of which I dreamed when I was a little boy, for which I had fought a hundred battles and defeated a hundred foes,

and which hope I have cherished night and day in my lonely mountains and valleys, in the battlefield and in camp, for the last twenty years Can freedom be achieved by the sacrifice of life in battle ”

Jay Singh listened to these earnest words , he saw tears in Sivaji's eyes , he replied as before in a quiet manner

“If truth fails to protect the pure Hindu religion, can deceit do so ? If the seed of freedom in the hero's breast fails to sprout, what avails shrewdness and cunning ?”

Sivaji was baffled After a long pause he spoke slowly “Maharaj, I regard you as my father , I have never met a soldier as dutiful and clear-headed as yourself , I am like your son I wish to ask you a question , I want a fatherly advice During my wanderings in my boyhood days among the mountains and valleys of Konkan I have thought deep thoughts and dreamed ambitious dreams I would feel that Bhawani herself was exhorting me to liberate my country, to establish Hindu temples all over the land, to disperse the enemies of my religion I was a child I was infatuated by the dream Proudly I took up the sword, I gathered heroes round me, I commenced my career of conquests When I was a young man I dreamt the same dream—the greatness of the Hindu name, the glorification of Hindu

religion, the establishment of Hindu liberty It was the spell of the dream that enabled me to make conquests, to defeat my enemies, to extend my territories, to establish temples Kshatriya Raj, was my ambition a crime, and my dream a pure illusion? Speak as a father to a son "

Raja Jai Singh, honest and experienced, remained silent for a long while , then he spoke slowly in a solemn voice "Raja," he said, "I know of no loftier cause than what you have espoused , I know of no dream more real than yours, Sivaji , I fully understand the great purpose you have at heart , I have praised it among my friends and enemies, I have exhorted my boy, Ram Singh, to emulate you example , I have not forgotten the glory of Rajput freedom And more, Sivaji, your dream is not a mere dream The more I see, the more I feel, that the Moghul Empire is passing away , these wars and strivings are all in vain , the Moslem rule is stained with dishonour, it is sapped with luxury, it is damned by the curse of oppressed Hindus , like a crumbling structure it cannot stand together much longer Sooner or later this grandiose fabric of an empire will be dust, and then will rise the Hindu glory once again The life-seed of the Mahratta is sprouting , its fire of youth will perhaps sweep the land Sivaji, your dream

is not a mere dream , Bhawani's exhortations are not illusions "

These words sent a thrill of joy and hope through Sivaji "Then why, O Mahatma, do you still stand by the empire, like a solitary pillar of the Moghul palace a crumbling ?" he exclaimed

"Honesty is the religion of the Kshatriya I shall fulfil my promise But what is impossible cannot be accomplished , a crumbling structure must fall "

"Well, fulfil your promise Even the gods in heaven, amazed at your sterling faithfulness to crafty Aurangzeb, will have nothing but praise for you But I have given no promise to Aurangzeb Will you blame me if I employ my brains, my skill, to achieve the advancement of my country and crush Aurangzeb ?"

"Kshatriya Raj, craftiness is always reprehensible in a soldier, and more so when the cause is lofty The ascendancy of the Mahrattas cannot be withheld, they will gain greater strength, and perhaps they may be the rulers of *Bharatvarsha*. But Sivaji, the training you are giving your people today they will never forget Please do not take offence at what I say , you are teaching them today to ravage towns, tomorrow they will ravage *Bharatvarsha* , you are teaching them today to overcome the enemy by craft and cunning, they will never learn to face the enemy in the open

field Like a true guru, implant true virtue in a people who are destined to be the rulers of *Bharat* An evil seed will bear evil fruit throughout the land for a hundred years Listen to the words of an old experienced Rajput Train your men to meet the enemy in the open field and forget the lessons of craft and cunning You are a great Hindu Hundreds of times have I praised your lofty purpose If you fail to impart the noble lesson of virtue to your people, who else will? Be careful, every act of yours will bear its fruit for many many years throughout the whole land "

Sivaji listened to these weighty words and for a long while remained silent At length he spoke "You are the guru of gurus, your advice is very precious indeed But today I have yielded myself to Aurangzeb, when shall I have an opportunity to impart instruction to my people?"

"Victory and defeat alternate, I win today, you win tomorrow, today you submit to Aurangzeb, tomorrow you may be free "

'May God fulfil your predictions, but so long as you are the commander of Aurangzeb's forces freedom for me is impossible Bhawani herself has prohibited war against the Hindus "

Jai Singh smiled "Life is ephemeral, how long will the old man last? but so long as he lives, he will perform his duty "

“May you live long,” said Sivaji

“Now let us part, Sivaji” I have served under Aurangzeb’s father, and now I serve under Aurangzeb, but so long as I live I shall never be false to the crown But great Kshatriya, be assured that the glory of the Mahratta race and the rise of Hindu power cannot be withheld Believe an old man, the Moghul Raj will crumble and Hindu greatness is inevitable Before long the whole country will resound with your fame and the rising glory of the Hindus ”

With tears in his eyes Sivaji embraced Jai Singh “Oh righteous man,” he said, “may flowers and sandal rain on your head , may your words come true ‘ I shall not raise the sword against you for I have delivered myself to you , but if in the course of events I gain my liberty then, Kshatriya Raj, I shall meet you, and at your feet I shall seek your instruction once again ”

CHAPTER XV

THE STORMING OF RUDRA MANDAL

Peace was soon restored Sivaji handed back the fortresses which he had taken from the Moghuls , he also restored twenty out of thirty two fortresses, which he had either captured or built in the kingdom of Ahmadnagar, now no more, and retained the remaining twelve as *jaagir* under Aurangzeb In return for these concessions he obtained from the emperor some territory in the kingdom of Bijapur, and his eighteen years old son, Sambhuji, received the title of Mansabdar of Five Thousand

After peace with Sivaji Raja Jai Singh directed his efforts to reduce the kingdom of Bijapur and extend the imperial rule over it Sivaji did not break the treaty which his father had arranged between him and Bijapur, but the sultan, availing himself of the difficulty in which Sivaji had involved himself, made no scruple in attacking his kingdom And so Sivaji, as an ally of Jai Singh, commenced a war against Ali Adil Shah, the Sultan of Bijapur, and captured a good many of his fortresses with his Mawali troops

The friendship between Jai Singh and Sivaji became closer and a genuine attachment sprang up between the two soldiers. They remained together most of the time and assisted each other in their respective wars. It is needless to say that a young havildar belonging to Sivaji's force remained in the residence of a Brahmin priest. Is it necessary to mention his name ?

Simple-minded Janardan Dev had come to regard Raghunath as his son, and Raghunath, when he found time, would visit the priest and get news of Rajasthan and his own country, Ambar, and listen to the achievements of Jai Singh. Occasionally, he would speak of wars till midnight, describing the storming of castles, attacks on enemy camps, and fierce fights in the jungles or on the top of mountains. While narrating these events his eyes would sparkle, his voice tremble, and his countenance would flush with excitement. Janardan Dev heard these tales with a sense of nervousness, and from the next room, Sarayu, seated silently, listened to the burning words, and with tears in her eyes invoked the assistance of God to protect the youthful soldier. These tales would proceed till midnight, and then Sarayu would bring in the food, and standing beside Raghunath while he took his meal, would feast her eyes on his god-like form. And after that, when, he took leave to depart or spoke to her, the

bashful girl could make no reply she would draw her veil and slip away and send an answer through her maid

This was not necessary Raghunath fully understood the language of her eyes, and Sarayu also read his thoughts in his Their lives, their minds, their souls, were flooded with the glad waves of first love, youth's first love filled their hearts with extatic delight

After capturing a number of fortresses within a short time Sivaji decided to storm one of the most difficult and inaccessible citadel in Bijapur He gave no clue of his line of attack, and not even his own men knew what would be his next objective He had his camp near Jai Singh's, about ten or twelve miles from an enemy fortress In the evening he issued orders that a thousand Mawalis and Mahrattas must be ready for immediate action At 9 o'clock he announced that he would launch an attack on Rudra Mandal, and with these one thousand men marched towards the fortress

In the darkness of the night they arrived at the foot of a hill All round, the land was flat, and in its midst rose a lofty hill on which was built the fortress of Rudra Mandal There was only one path leading to the top, but this being wartime, that path was closed The other sides of the hill featured thick jungle and steep

rocks, very difficult to negotiate. There was no path. Sivaji gave the order to ascend. Clinging to trees and leaping from rock to rock like mountain cats, these Mawali and Mahratta soldiers commenced to climb the hill. Sometimes on their feet, and sometimes squatting, clinging to overhanging branches and jumping from ledge to ledge, they continued swarming up the hill slowly. It is doubtful whether any other race has produced climbers as adept as the Mahrattas.

After they had proceeded halfway Sivaji noticed some lights appear on the ramparts of the fort above. He stood for a while, thoughtful. Had the enemy information of his approach? What else could account for the appearance of those lights? Their rays reached the foot of the fortress, and the lights seemed to indicate that the defenders were expecting the enemy and had provided against an attack in darkness. Sivaji gave instruction to his men to advance more cautiously through screens of rocks and trees. His men moved silently. They continued to swarm up behind the shelter of trees, thickets and stones. There was not a sound. Sivaji advanced in the deep hush of a dark night.

After a while they arrived at the edge of a level and open plot of ground. This was illuminated by the light that fell from above, and a movement of troops across it would very probably be noticed.

Sivaji stopped again. Standing beneath a tree he cast his eyes around. In front was the open treeless space about fifty yards wide, and beyond that a thick forest. Was it possible to cross the bit of space without being noticed? The slopes on either side presented an impassable barrier. He looked below. They had already climbed a considerable height, and a descent and fresh ascent by another route might not be accomplished before the sun appeared. After waiting a while he sent for Tannaji Malasri, his trusted Mawali friend, and conferred with him in whispers for sometime. Then Tannaji left. Sivaji waited, his men waited.

Tannaji returned within half an hour and spoke to Sivaji in a whisper. After a moment's thought Sivaji said "Be it so there is no other way."

There was a water-course or gully that had been scooped on the hillside by the rain. It was very deep with high slopes on either side. It was decided to make the ascent by this route, the lofty sides affording a secure screen from the enemy above. The troops began to move along the gully. The thousand men slowly continued their ascent along this gorge covered with huge rocks and boulders. Before long they entered a thick clump of trees. Sivaji offered a silent prayer of gratitude to Bhawanî.

Suddenly behind him a man fell. Sivaji

looked. There was an arrow in his chest. Another shaft, a second man fell, and then a rain of shafts. The enemy were wide awake. They had noticed the course of the men along the deep gorge and were pointing their fire in that direction.

Sivaji's troops waited behind the shelter of trees. The shooting stopped. Sivaji realized that the enemy had discovered the presence of the aggressors. He cast his eyes at the fort and saw a large number of lights and guards moving in different directions. He was only twenty-five yards from the outer wall of the fortress. The defenders were on their guard, and the castle could only be taken after fierce fighting.

Sivaji's life-long companion also noticed these things. He spoke slowly. "There is yet time for us to move down, if we don't get the fort tonight, we can get it tomorrow, if we make an attempt tonight, we might lose all our men."

"I shall do what I promised to Jai Singh," replied Sivaji in a solemn voice. "I shall capture Rudra Mandal tonight if it costs my life."

Sivaji continued his advance silently through the trees. To delude the enemy he sent a hundred men to the further side of the hill with instructions to make a sham attack. Within a short while the sound of guns was heard from that direction. Believing that the attack was from the other side, the guard and the troops rushed off to defend the

opposite side , the lights on the battlements that faced Sivaji disappeared "Mahrattas," said Sivaji, "you have given proof of your courage in a hundred fights and preserved the good name of Sivaji, furnish the proof once more tonight Tannaji, give me proof of your life-long friendship to-night "

These words inspired courage in the hearts of the men In silence, in the deep darkness of the night they reached the fortress wall It was past midnight, there was no light in the sky, there was no sound, only from time to time the night air carried the sigh of the foliage

Sivaji was ten yards from the castle wall when a sentinel appeared on the top of it He had heard a sound among the trees A Mawal soldier silently discharged an arrow, the unfortunate man's dead body fell outside the castle wall This noise drew a number of troops, which quickly increased to two or three hundred on the wall and below it Secrecy was now impossible With lips compressed and tense with excitement Sivaji gave the order of attack

"Har, Har, Mahadeo !" The roar of the aggressors ascended the air A part of the force rushed forward to scale the wall while the rest remained behind, and from the shelter of woods rained their arrows on the defenders The Mahomedans also, without flinching, raised the cry of

"Alla ho Akbar" that made the earth and sky ring, and rushed forward. Some discharged their arrows from the wall, while others, spoiling for a fight, leaped down and engaged the enemy in the woods.

Soon a fierce conflict ensued below the wall and under the trees. The men on the wall hurled their javelins on the aggressors below, while the latter showered their arrows on the defenders. Dead bodies began to pile up near the wall, and the men stepped on these bodies and continued a fierce hand to hand conflict with sword and spear. Hundreds of Mahomedans had penetrated the woods. The Mawalis, like tigers, leaped forward and attacked them. The powerful Afgans fought splendidly, and soon the hill slopes were streaming with human blood. Hundreds of Mah-rattas, stationed under trees, in thickets, or behind rocks, continued to discharge their arrows, which poured through the leaves and branches in a ceaseless stream and thinned the ranks of the defenders.

At this moment a voice of thunder, drowning the noise of battle, rose in the air. "Sivaji Ki Jai" All eyes turned in the direction of the sound. A young Rajput soldier had pierced through the ranks of the enemy, with the aid of his long spear he had vaulted on the fortress wall, he dashed down the Pathan standard, killed the

standard bearer, and standing boldly on the bartizan, in a voice of thunder raised the battle cry "Sivaji Ki Jai"

For a moment there was a pause in the conflict, and Hindus and Mahomedans gazed on the tall figure, on which the light of stars fell, with amazement. His steel helmet gleamed in the star-light, his hands and arms were covered with blood, his broad powerful chest displayed enemy arrows, his tall spear streamed with blood, his eyes flashed through a profusion of hair that partly obscured them. The enemy, surprised, moved back like waves for a moment, and for a moment they thought that the god of war himself, with his tall lance, had descended from the skies.

And then the Afgans rushed forward and surrounded him like black clouds. Raghunath's skill in the use of the sword and lance was unrivalled, but it was not possible to fight a hundred men. His life was in great danger.

Fired by the example of the heroic Rajput, the Mawalis, like tigers, leaped on the fortress wall and commenced a fierce fight around him. Two or three hundred men crowded on the top of the wall and on its side, and with sword and dagger broke through the Pathan ranks and cleared a way ahead. The fortress resounded with their cries. To fight a thousand Mahrattas with a strength of two or three hundred men only was

not possible for the Pathans They failed to stem the attack

Sivaji and Tannaji leaped down from the fortress wall and rushed towards the castle The men realized that fighting was no longer necessary at the spot and sped behind them With the speed of lightning Sivaji reached the castle This place was strongly fortified and defended By Sivaji's orders the castle was surrounded and the guard outside put to the sword Then he called out in a trumpet voice to the keeper of the castle

"Open the gate or the castle will be burnt down '

"You may burn the castle, but I shall never open my door to a *Kafer*," came the bold reply

Torches were hurried to the spot and fire was applied to the doors and windows The defenders showered their arrows to prevent the aggressors achieving their purpose Many men with torches were killed, but the building caught fire

Doors, windows, beams, rafters and laths, and then the whole of the enormous structure took fire Huge roaring flames leaped up to sky with flaring lights and dispelled the darkness of the night The great blaze could be seen and heard from a great distance all around and proclaimed that Rudra Mandal had been stormed

Rahamat Khan, the master of the fort, had done what was possible for a hero to do, and now

to die like a hero was the only thing that remained to him. When the castle was blazing Rahamat Khan and his followers jumped down from the roof. They singled out Maharatta opponents and fought with their swords, killing a good many of them.

The aggressors in a body surrounded the Afgans, and in the conflict the latter began to lose their men one by one until only a few remained. Rahamat Khan, wounded and faint, continued a heroic fight. The Mahrattas attacked him from all sides and raised their swords to strike, and his life hung in the balance when Sivaji gave the order to take him prisoner and not to kill him. They wrenched away his sword, bound his hands, and took him away a captive.

While his men were engaged in putting out the fire Sivaji noticed in the distance a dark cloud of Afgan soldiers, five hundred strong, marching up on the further side of the hill. It may be remembered that before launching his attack on the fortress he had sent a hundred men in order to delude the defenders by a sham attack on the opposite side of the hill. The feint had succeeded, and a large number of Afgans had rushed off in that direction. The wily Mahrattas, concealed in trees, had kept up a show of fight for a while and had gradually retreated, and their enemy, elated at their success, had pursued them to the

bottom of the hill. They had no inkling that the real attack had been made from the other side of the hill and that Sivaji was in possession of the fortress.

When, however, the fields and villages, the hills and valleys, were lighted up by the flare of the burning castle, they realized their mistake and they hurried back to meet and destroy the enemy on the hill top. Sivaji had been able to take the place owing to the small number of defenders, he now saw that he had to deal with a force of five hundred powerful Afgans, who were making their way towards him. It was a critical moment. He decided that the most effective stand could be made within the castle itself. It was protected by stone battlements on all sides which had not been destroyed by the fire. The wooden doors and windows had been burnt down, and in some places the roof had collapsed, leaving a mass of stones and debris on the floor. His quick eye told him that there was no better place than the castle itself to withstand the attack of a superior force.

He planned out the operation in a moment. He stationed Tannaji and two hundred men within the castle, placed his archers round the battlements and at the doors and windows, and his spear-men on the castle roof. Stones and debris were removed to places where barriers

were needed. Then turning to Tannaji with a smile, he said "You will defend this place if attacked by the enemy, but before that we may be able to deal with them effectively. They are still mounting the hill. A sudden attack on them now is imperative. Tannaji ! Remain here with your two hundred men and I shall make the attempt."

"I shall not remain here nor any of my two hundred men," replied Tannaji. "Kshatriya Raj, remain here and prepare to defend the castle, I am fully capable of dispersing the enemy."

"You are right," said Sivaji with a smile, "the sight of the enemy roused my fighting spirit. Your advice is excellent. I shall remain here." Then raising his voice he called out "Is there any one among my havildars who will undertake to disperse the enemy with two hundred men?"

Eager voices were heard and ten men stepped forward. Raghunath was among them on one side. He stood silent with his eyes on the ground. Sivaji inspected the group, then addressing Raghunath, he said "Havildar, you are the youngest amongst these, but your arm has the strength of a giant. I am pleased with your courage, Raghunath. You commenced the assault of the fortress, it is right you should complete your work."

Raghunath bowed down to the ground, and

then with the speed of lightning he disappeared from view with two hundred men "That havildar is a Rajput," said Sivaji, turning to Tannaji, "and his appearance and courage indicate a noble lineage But he has never talked of his family or boasted of his remarkable courage One day he saved my life in Poona, today he was the foremost in the attack on this fortress I have done nothing for him yet, tomorrow in the royal court, and in the presence of Raja Jai Singh, I shall give him a suitable reward "

Raghunath achieved the task he had undertaken The Mahrattas hurled their javelins on the Afgans as they were ascending the hill, and with shouts of "Hara Hara Mahadeo" they rushed on them But there was no resistance The light of torches revealed a large force of Mahrattas on the top of the hill, and realizing that the fortress was in their hands and it would be difficult to recover it, the Afgans retreated down the hill and dispersed The Mawalis pursued and with sword and dagger slaughtered a large number of the enemy.

Raghunath now recalled his men "Useless slaughter is forbidden by Sivaji," he said The task was completed, the Afgans had been dispersed

Raghunath then posted sentinels along the fortress wall and in the rooms where the munitions were stored, he inspected every nook and

corner, and after providing for the safety of the fortress, he approached Sivaji, bowed, and made his report

The crimson of dawn appeared in the east, a cool breeze began to blow, the fort was silent. The peaceful hill-top, clothed in foliage, seemed a befitting hermitage for *yogis* and *rishis* which had never been disturbed by the malignant noise of war

CHAPTER XVI.

THE REWARD

There is a display of great pomp and splendour in the fortress of Rudra Mandal the following afternoon. Raja Jai Singh and Sivaji occupy the royal guddy, which is spread over with a crimson cloth under a crimson *Shamiana* or awning supported on silver columns. Troops are drawn on all sides, and the bayonets of their muskets display victory flags that float in the morning breeze. Hundreds of throats proclaim the victory of Jai Singh and Sivaji.

"You are the right hand of the Emperor of Delhi," spoke Jai Singh with a smile, addressing Sivaji. "The Emperor will always remember your services. You have achieved all your objectives."

"The presence of Jai Singh means victory."

"We may be able to capture Bijapur shortly. I never expected you would be able to take this fort within a few hours of the night."

"Maharaj," said Sivaji, "the storming of fortresses has been my training since my childhood; yet I could not take this fortress as easily as I had hoped."

"Why ?"

"I hoped to take the defenders unawares , but they were wide awake and ready to meet us I have never before lost so many men in a storming operation," said Sivaji

"During war the enemy might be expected to be on the alert always "

"True, but I have stormed so many fortress, but never before have I found the enemy so well prepared " -

"Experience has taught them to be more careful," said Jai Singh, "but careful or otherwise, it is impossible to resist Sivaji , his victory cannot be thwarted "

"By your blessings I was successful, but the loss I suffered last night can never be repaired Out of a thousand, two or three hundred of my men I shall never see again , such determined and trustworthy men I shall never be able to replace " Sivaji remained thoughtful for a while and then gave orders to bring in the prisoners

The fort was defended by one thousand men, but the operations of the previous night only furnished one or two hundred prisoners , the rest had been killed or dispersed The prisoners were brought before Sivaji , their hands were tied behind their backs

"Release them," said Sivaji, then addressing the prisoners he said "Brave Afgans, you have

fought like heroes , I admire your conduct You are free You may take service under the Emperor of Delhi, or you may go back to your Sultan , no one will touch a hair of your head ”

This order did not come as a surprise After battles and the capture of fortresses Sivaji always treated his prisoners generously , his friends occasionally blamed him for this, but he took no heed Many of the Afgans, touched by this act of generosity, consented to take service under the Emperor

And then Sivaji ordered Rahmat Khan, the master of the fortress, to be brought before him His hands also were tied behind his back, there was a sword-cut on his forehead and an arrow wound in his arm Proudly he stood before the court and fixed his fearless gaze on Sivaji

Sivaji rose from the royal guddy and approached the brave soldier With his sword he cut the ligature of his hands Then he spoke slowly “Noble soldier,” he said, “your hands were tied and you were kept a prisoner during the night You will pardon the treatment , it was in accordance with the laws of war You are free Victory and defeat are shaped by destiny I deem it an honour to have fought against such a brave man as yourself ”

Rahmat Khan had been expecting a death sentence Not a muscle of his eyelids had quiver-

ed at the thought, but Sivaji's great generosity filled his heart with a deep gratitude. In the thick of the fight there was never a sign of weakness or distress, but now the eyes of the veteran soldier moistened. He turned away his head, wiped a tear, and then spoke slowly.

"Kshatriya Raj, last night I was overwhelmed by your prowess, today I am overwhelmed by your magnanimity. He, who is the God of both Hindus and Mussalmans, the Badshah above badshahs, the Sultan over earth and sky, has, for your virtues, given you authority and power to extend your kingdom."

Raja Jai Singh spoke. "Pathan General, you have proved your worthiness for the high post you have held. The Emperor of Delhi, if he could avail of your services, would undoubtedly be pleased to give you a higher command. Have I your permission to inform the emperor that you are willing to accept a suitable post in his service?"

"Maharaj," answered Rahmat Khan, "I am greatly honoured by your offer, but I shall not desert the master to whom I have rendered lifelong service. So long as this hand can hold a sword, it will hold it for Bijapur."

"Be it so," said Sivaji, "rest in the fortress to-night, and tomorrow morning my men will accompany you to the gates of Bijapur."

"Kshatriya Raj," said Rahamat Khan, "you

have acted very generously towards me I shall be frank and shall conceal nothing from you Make a search among your men , they are not all loyal I had previous information of your attack on the fortress, and my men, therefore, were watchful and ready The man who gave the information is one of your soldiers I cannot say more , I will not break my promise ”

With these words Rahamat Khan turned and and walked away slowly with his guard towards the palace Sivaji's countenance became black with rage, his eyes shot flames, his whole frame shook with emotion His friends realized that advice would be futile , his men saw that a storm would break

Raja Jai Singh had never seen Sivaji in such a mood He restrained him with soothing words, then turning to the men around he commenced a series of questions

“At what time were you informed of the proposed storming of this fort ?” he asked

“At 9 o'clock in the night” was the reply

“And none of you knew of this before 9 o'clock ?”

“We knew it was intended to storm a fort, but we did not know that this was to be the fort ”

“At what time did you reach this place ?”

“Approximately at about 10-30 o'clock

“Excellent Between 9 and 10-30 was there

anybody absent? If so reveal him. The reputation of the entire army must not suffer for the fault of a single man. You have faithfully fought under Sivaji in his campaigns in many lands, and such a noble master you will never find. Prove that you are worthy of his trust. If there is a traitor among you, reveal him. If he has been killed last night, let me have his name. Why should a false suspicion be allowed to tarnish the good name of the army?"

The men recalled the events of the previous night, they talked together. Sivaji's anger appeared to be appeased somewhat. "Maharaj," he said, if you can discover the traitor I shall always remain grateful to you."

Chandra Rao, a jumladar, at length came forward. "Sire," he spoke slowly, "at 9 o'clock last night when we commenced our march I made a search for a havildar under me, he was not among my men. He joined us when we reached the foot of the hill."

"Is he still alive?"

There was intense curiosity in the ranks to hear the name of the man. There was pin-drop silence. Chandra Rao slowly uttered the name "Raghunathji Havildar."

They remained speechless, stunned with amazement.

Chandra Rao was a distinguished soldier, but

Raghunath's fame had eclipsed his Jealousy is perhaps the most powerful instinct in man

Sivaji's face flushed crimson Biting his lips he spoke fiercely to Chandra Rao "Slanderer," he cried, "this is a false charge Your wicked calumny will not touch the splendid reputation of Raghunath I have watched his career with my own eyes Let my men witness the punishment I inflict on maligners "

He gripped his lance and raised it, but before he could execute his purpose Raghunath stepped forward and said "Maharaj, my officer, Chandra Rao, has spoken the truth , there was a delay, and I joined the force at the foot of the hill '

Again a silence , everybody remained speechless

For a while Sivaji was motionless as a stone statue, then wiping the sweat from his brow he said slowly "Am I dreaming ? Raghunath, have you done this ? You, who with fierce courage led the charge last night in the assault on this fortress, and later dispersed five hundred Afgans with only two hundred men , is it possible that you acted the spy and pre-warned the enemy ?

"Sire, I am not guilty of that crime," he answered calmly.

The tall, fearless young soldier was standing boldly in front of Sivaji, his eyes were steady, not a muscle of his eyelids moved The

piercing gaze of the court and the surrounding crowd was fixed upon him, calm, unruffled and motionless, only his broad chest heaved with the deep breath he drew. Just as on the previous night when he had stood alone on the fortress wall among a numerous enemy, so today, beset by a graver peril, he retained the same firm and courageous attitude.

"Then why did you disobey my order? Why were you absent at 9 o'clock?" Sivaji exclaimed in great anger.

Raghunath's lips quivered, but he made no reply. His gaze was fixed on the ground.

Finding him speechless Sivaji's suspicion deepened. Fire sparkled in his eyes. In a voice trembling with rage he cried out, "Traitor! this explains your display of courage, but in an evil moment did you practise deception on Sivaji."

Raghunath replied in the same calm and steady voice, "Sire, deceit and treachery are foreign to my family, perhaps my officer Chandra Rao knows this."

Raghunath's unruffled attitude was like a sacrificial offering to Sivaji's burning wrath. "Wicked man," he cried, "vain is your attempt to escape me. You may flee from the clutches of a hungry lion, but not from the burning wrath of Sivaji."

Raghunath replied in the same calm tone, "Sire, I do not pray for your mercy, I do not ask

forgiveness from man , may God forgive my sins "

Mad with rage Sivaji raised his spear and in a voice of thunder cried out "The penalty of treachery is death "

Raghunath saw the keen spear in his powerful hand , in an unruffled voice he said "Sire, I am willing to die, but I am not guilty of treachery "

Sivaji lost control of himself and the spear which never missed its mark trembled in his grasp Raja Jai Singh placed his hand upon his arm

Sivaji's features were distorted with rage , his whole frame shook with emotion , forgetting the respect due to Jai Singh he cried out "Let me go, I do not know the Rajput law, nor do I wish to know it, but the true Mahratta law is death penalty for a traitor Sivaji will carry out that law "

Jai Singh was unruffled by his manner Calmly he said "Kshatriya Raj, you will not be able to undo what you do today You will regret the death penalty on this soldier all your life I have grown grey in wars , take my advice, this man is not a traitor, but we need not investigate this matter now You are my friend , I ask for the life of this soldier from my friend , Grant me my request "

Sivaji was ashamed of his rudeness "Father," he said, "forgive the harsh words I spoke , I shall never disobey you, but I could never imagine that

Sivaji would forgive a traitor Havilder," he continued, turning to Raghunath, "Raja Jai Singh has saved your life , get out of my sight , Sivaji will not see your face again "

Raghunath turned to go

"Wait," cried out Sivaji, "two years ago I gave you the sword you are wearing , my sword must not be polluted in the hands of a traitor Guards, take away the sword and turn the traitor out "

Raghunath had taken the sentence of death with an unruffled countenance, but his whole frame trembled with emotion and his eyes flashed fire when his sword was wrenched away He controlled his feelings, however , he fixed his glance at Sivaji, then bowing down to the ground he left the fortress

The shadows of the evening begin to close over the world A solitary wanderer descends from the hill and takes his way across a field He crosses the field and comes to a village He passes the village and enters another field The shadows around deepen , the night wind fitfully sighs across the fading landscape, and then the traveller is seen no more

CHAPTER XVII

CHANDRA RAO JUMLADAR

This is our first meeting with Chandra Rao Jumladar. He was a man of keen intellect and extra-ordinary courage and determination. Although only five or six years older than Raghunath, at first glance he looked forty. His broad forehead was marked with lines of care and his hair was touched with grey. He had small gleaming eyes. Those who knew him would say that his keen foresight and his firm undeviating resolve were on a par with his spirit and courage. His countenance featured those qualities. He had an iron frame. Peoples who knew of his great vigour, his inhuman wrath, his deep subtlety and his force of character, seldom cared to cross the reticent and resolute jumladar. He possessed another virtue—or call it vice if you like—which was not apparent. His soul was fired with inordinate ambition. His keen intellect would discover the path of his advancement, this unswerving resolve would keep him to that path, and his sword would remove all obstruction from it. Friend or foe, innocent or guilty, a benefactor or otherwise, if he happened to come in his way, Chandra Rao

without the slightest scruple would trample on him like a worm and clear his path to advancement. The course of events threw young Raghunath across his path, the jumladar trampled upon him like a worm and made his way clear. We must know something of the previous history of the extra-ordinary man, and while dealing with him, we may gather some information about Raghunath.

Chandra Rao never touched upon his life's history. He had been reared from his boyhood by Gajapati Singh, a military commander, under Raja Jaswant Singh of Marwar. The orphan was employed in household duties, and he would look after Gajapati's children and sometimes accompany his master to the wars. At the early age of fifteen he had developed a serious vein, a fine spirit, and a forceful character. This pleased Gajapati who came to look upon him as one of his own children. He was given a post in the army.

His talent and gallantry surprised his superior officers. He was always found where fighting was heaviest among the accumulating dead bodies of friend and foe, and where the sky, charged with smoke and dust, resounded with the shouts of the victors and the groans of the dying. After the battle he would slip away from the company of his comrades who devoted the evening to music,

songs and laughter. The ambitious resolute young man would retire to his tent, or would wander alone thoughtfully in the fields or by the riverside. In a measure he realized his ambition, he was now no longer an unknown Rajput boy, he had been promoted, and had come to be acknowledged as a man of inordinate courage and spirit, with his reputation, pride and ambition also increased.

Chandra Rao once saved his master from grave peril in a battle. For this Gajapati Singh received and honoured him in the presence of all. "Chandra Rao," he said, "you have saved my life today. How can I reward you?"

The young man stood silent in a humble attitude.

"Think over it," Gajapati spoke feelingly, "let me know what you desire, wealth, power, promotion, Chandra Rao, I can refuse you nothing."

Then Chandra Rao, slowly raising his eyes to his master, spoke. "The world knows that the Rajput hero never breaks his word. Hero of heroes, I seek the hand of your daughter, Lakshmi Bai."

Everybody remained silent, speechless. Gajapati Singh felt that the vault of heaven had collapsed over his head, his frame trembled with rage, and his hand gripped the sword. Then controlling his wrath he laughed out and said, "I shall fulfil my promise, but you were born in

the Mahratta country , Rajput girls are not accustomed to live with Mahratta robbers in their jungles and hill caves First build a suitable home for Lakshmi Bai, build a fortress in place of a jungle hut, shed the reputation of a robber and attain the dignity and rank of a warrior, and then repeat your request Have you any other prayer ?”

“No other prayer, just now, sire,” Chandra Rao replied slowly “when I have any other wish I shall reveal it ”

The gathering broke up , the men returned to their tents The generous-hearted Gajapati calmed down and in a few days forgot the incident But not so Chandra Rao That evening he slowly paced the floor of his tent The tent was dark, but the darkness that filled his heart and mind was deeper

After 6 o'clock he lighted a lamp and carefully wrote something in a book He closed the book, opened it, read what he had written and closed it again. A cynical smile appeared in his countenance A friend dropped in about the time “What are you writing ?” he asked Chandra Rao answered in a natural voice, “O nothing, just accounts, making a note of my debts ” The book was in fact an account book and he had noted down a debt He closed the book and put out the lamp

About a year after this event there was a great battle between Aurangzeb and Yasovanta Singh of Marwar Gajapati Singh was slain in the battle *

Gajapati's two children Raghunath and Lakshmi Bai were returning from Marwar to their mountain fortress of Surya Mahal in Mewar Raghunath was twelve years of age and his sister only seven , an old servant accompanied them On their way they were attacked by a band of robbers The servant was killed and the children were kidnapped The boy, full of spirit even at this age, made his escape from the robbers' camp The robber-chief forcibly married the girl He was Chandra Rao

The ambition of the keen-witted man was in a measure attained He had accumulated wealth while in the service of Gajapati Singh , with this he purchased an extensive *jaagir* He attained a high social status in the Mahratta country Chandra Rao's family was sprung from an ancient Rajput stock This nobody believed But he had married the only daughter of the famous Gajapati Singh , this everyone saw For his courage and spirit Sivaji appointed him to the post of jumladar in his army His great wealth

* The author's novel "Madhavi Kankan" deals with the story of Gajapati Singh

and extensive jaagir won for him the respect of the people. His fame and reputation were growing from day to day when Raghunath crossed the path of his ambition. The jummladar soon cleared the path.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LAKSHMI BAI

At the age of twelve Raghunath had been kidnapped by Chandra Rao and taken away from Rajputana to the Mahratta country. He escaped one night, he kept himself in hiding for some time in caves, in the forests, in the fields or in the huts of humble people, none refused shelter and food to the beautiful boy.

The next five or six years was a period of suffering in various places. The orphan drifted from place to place in a sea of humanity. He wandered through many countries, and beggary and menial service furnished his means of subsistence. Thoughts of his father's valour, of his father's renown, filled his mind, but his pride screened the sorrow of his heart. Overwhelmed with grief, he would at times release its flow in a flood of tears in the silent fields or among the lonely mountains. He would then wipe his eyes and return to his duties.

Thoughts worthy of his lineage came to him with increasing years. He would try his master's helmet on his own head, and hang his sword to his side. In the evening, in the open fields he

would pour out in a full voice the ballads of his native land, and surprise the benighted traveller with songs of Sangram Singh and mighty Pratap. At the age of eighteen his thoughts turned on the achievement of Sivaji, his high purpose and his fierce daring. His soul thrilled with the thought that the Mahrattas, like the Rajputs, would some day be free, and Sivaji with his conquering armies would build up a Hindu kingdom in the south. He approached Sivaji and prayed for any inferior post in his army.

Sivaji possessed a keen understanding of human character, and within a few days he sized up the young man. He gave him a post of *havildar*, and shortly after this he sent him on a mission to the fortress of Torna. We met him first when he was on his way to the fortress. His real name was Raghunath Singh, but since his appointment in the Mahratta army he came to be known as Raghunathji havildar.

The death of a havildar under Chandra Rao had created a vacancy which was filled by Raghunath. Raghunath recognized Chandra Rao, who had served under his father, as a friend of his childhood. He did not know him as a kidnapper and husband of his sister, and so he naturally took to him. Chandra Rao treated the young soldier with respect but a cloud darkened the brow of the reticent jumladar.

The reputation of Raghunath's spirit and courage began to grow, and with it the cloud on Chandra Rao's brow deepened. His steel resolve never swerved, his deep-laid plans never failed. Good fortune saved Raghunath's life, but he was cast out from the army, branded as a traitor.

Chandra Rao took leave for a few days and went home. Let us accompany this great man.

At his palace gate music greeted his arrival. A host of servants and neighbours welcomed him. News of his return spread through the land. In the inner apartments there were loud preparations for his reception. Amidst this din and confusion Lakshmi Bai remained in her bed-room and silently made her arrangements to receive her lord.

Lakshmi Bai, like the goddess after whom she was named, was gentle, patient, chaste and wise. She had been the favourite of her father. At a tender age she fell in the hands of an iron-hearted reticent husband, among strangers, and like a plucked flower began to wither. Her young life was clouded and there was none to share her sorrow or to console her with kind words. She would think of her happy days, of her father and dear brother, and weep in secret.

Sorrow and affliction sharpen our intellect and teach us patience. Within a couple of years she had accustomed herself to the household regime

and the duties of an exemplary wife. The sole hope of a Hindu wife is her husband. If he is kind and tender-hearted, her life is unalloyed joy, and if unkind and indifferent, service to her husband is still her only hope. Chandra Rao was pleased with the devotion of his gentle tender-hearted wife. After strife and blood-shed he would return home and enjoy the blessings of peace and clasp the sweet and tender-hearted wife to his bosom. Lakshmi Bai would then feel she was the happiest and most fortunate of women, a kind act thrilled her, a kind word filled her heart with joy. A seedling from a bright garden, placed in a dark room, turns joyfully to the light.

Thus years rolled on and the sweet child attained her youth. But youth was stagnant, barren. Memories of her childhood days had faded, and if from time to time her mind went back to Rajasthan to the happy moments when she and her dear brother passed their time and played together, she would silently wipe the tears that trickled down her pale cheek and return to the duties of her household.

Chandra Rao is at his meal, Lakshmi Bai is standing beside, fanning him. She is now seventeen years of age. Bright, lovely and tender, but somewhat frail, her delicate eyebrows appear to have been drawn by an artist's brush, sweet and

gentle, her dark eyes are the home of sad thoughts. A fair lovely neck, but pale, a frail gentle form, the loveliness of youth is there without its joy, its spirit. The beautiful flower of Rajasthan has showered her fragrance and loveliness in a foreign land, but the freshness of life has fled. Her beautiful eyes, long hair, her slender arms, her tender form, have the loveliness of the pearl but not the glitter of the diamond.

Chandra Rao had told her one day that her brother held a havildar's post under him. He was winning fame. Chandra Rao's brow had clouded while he mentioned this. Lakshmi Bai's suspicion was roused.

Another day, encouraged by a few kind words, she takes her seat at the feet of her husband, and softly says, "I wish to tell you something, but I am afraid."

Chandra Rao is resting with a betel-leaf in his mouth. He kisses her tenderly. "What is it? tell me, there is nothing I can refuse," he says.

"My brother is only a child; he does not understand what he does."

His countenance becomes stern.

"He is your servant, your subordinate," she says.

"No," he replies, "he is known for courage higher than mine."

Lakshmi Bai has grasped the situation, her fears have been realized. Her husband's wrath had turned upon Raghunath.

She speaks in a voice trembling with fear: "If the boy has committed a sin, who but you can pardon him?"

Again a dark cloud crosses his brow. Lakshmi Bai knows her husband well. She does not raise the subject again.

Chandra Rao has returned home on leave. Lakshmi Bai knows nothing of what has happened to her brother. She notices his stern countenance. She offers him a betel-leaf and gently withdraws. Chandra Rao carefully closes the door of his room.

He takes out a box from a secret recess. He opens the box and brings out a book—an account book. About ten years ago, on the day he had been humiliated by Gajapati Singh, he had made an entry in that book. He opens the book at that page. There is the clear bold script as fresh as when it was made.

Lender	Gajapati
Debt	Humiliation
'Payment	By his blood by the humiliation of his family.

He reads the words once, twice. A cynical smile distorts his features as he makes the following entry in the same place: "Today the debt is

discharged ' He affixes the date and closes the book

He opens the door and calls Lakshmi Bai
Obediently she comes to him He holds her hand,
smiles and says "I have paid back today a very
old debt "

A cold shiver runs through her frail body

CHAPTER XIX.

THE TEMPLE OF ISHANI

At a distance of a few miles from the palace of the great Chandra Rao was the temple of Ishani. It had been built on the top of a low hill in the remote past. Steps carved in the rock in front of the temple led down to the edge of a crystal stream below, which with a low murmur washed the base of the hill. From the very earliest times millions of pilgrims and devotees had performed their holy ablutions in the waters of the stream, had trodden these stone steps and offered their worship in the temple, and to this day the flow of pilgrims continues, and the ancient temple retains its pristine holiness. The temple was girdled by tall trees, and the entire hillside from peak to base was clothed in foliage. Even in the day time the spreading branches cast a twilight gloom over the scene, and in the peaceful shade in their little cottages dwelt the Brahmin worshippers and the devotees. That holy spot seemed never to have known any other spirit than that of quiet repose, or to have heard any sound other than the music of Vedic hymns or the chanting of the Puranas. Many wars and strifes had spread

destruction over the land of the Mahrattas, but Hindu or Mahomedan had never disturbed the small peaceful hill-temple with sounds of war

It is 9 o'clock at night A stranger is wandering alone among the peaceful trees His heart is restless, his brow is furrowed, his countenance inflamed and there is madness in his eyes Wrath, vengeance, and deep despondency possess his soul

He paces the silent woods for a long while His body feels limp but a fire burns within him Frenzy has gripped him The burden must be lifted from his soul or madness will seize him Nature is a hard physician When grief like a spear enters the heart, when trouble scorches the body, when disease grips the mind and there is no human remedy, nature deprives the patient of thought and relieves him Loss of memory has been the cure of thousands of unfortunate men and women , thousands pray for it without relief

Nearby, some Brahmins were engaged in a recital from the Puranas Ah ! those holy words steeped in music, fell like a gentle rain of nectar , they slowly rose into the dark sky jewelled with stars Those holy words resounded through the dark silent woods and seemed to animate the senseless trees around Leaf and branch thirstily drank in the music, the breeze carried the song, and the human heart melted in its soothing balm

For hundreds of years these holy words have rung and echoed in Bharatvarsha. For thousands of years has the holy chant sounded in distant lands, in beautiful Bengal, in snow-capped Kashmir girdled in ice, in Rajasthan, the mother of heroes, in the land of the Mahrattas, in Karnat and in Dravida, washed by the foaming sea. May the holy music continue to ring forever, may we never forget the sacred love of the past. In the days of our glory the eternal song inspired our ancestors, and Hastina, Ayodhaya, Mithila and Kasi, Magadha and Ujjayan, were roused to heroism and fame by its stirring music. When clouds began to gather, Samar Singh, Sangram Singh, Pratap Singh, gave their life-blood for their religion with the great song on their lips, and Sivaji, charmed by its spell, rose once again to restore the glory of the ancient past. Weak and feeble, the only hope of the Hindus today is this holy song, in peril and despondency may we never forget the sacred love of the past, and so long as our national life exists may our heart-chorus ring to the holy music of our ancient scriptures.

Gentle reader, you know your Iliad and Æneid, you are familiar with Shakespeare and Dante, you have read Goethe and Hugo, you delight in Sadi and Fardushi, but search the innermost corner of your heart. What is it that probes the depth of your feeling, stirs and inspires

you, holds you spell-bound ? The legend of the splendid heroism of Bhishmacharya, of the wonderful loyalty and devotion of the unhappy Sita These legends are woven into every fibre of the Hindu heart , may the Hindu race never forget them

Reader, we shall sing together once again the songs of our national glory , we shall recall the heroism of the ancient days, of more recent times , it is with this purpose I have taken up my pen If we can inspire our souls with the songs of our glory, the labour will not have been in vain , if we fail, cast away my books and I shall cherish no regret

In the peaceful forest the holy words and music descended like gentle rain on Raghunath's burning brow and sprinkled peace upon his restless soul Slowly his frenzy began to subside How trivial were his own woes and sorrows in the light of the mighty tales of the ancient heroes and heroines ! How small his own ambition and courage ! Care-killing slumber softly took him in its arms, and Raghunath's worn out and exhausted body lay motionless under the trees

Dreams came to him What dreams ? Dreams of his ambition ? Dreams of his gradual rise, of his future fame ? Alas no ! That dream of his life had been broken, that ambition had ended forever , in an illusory world that illusion had faded out

Dreams of wars, the storming of castles, the destruction of the enemy, and himself in the thick of the conflict ? Alas no ! his last battle had been fought , that dream too had varnished forever

All the efforts of his youth had failed one by one, the lamp of hope had died out In the dark night, friendless and alone, old memories revived—such memories as come to a lonely, friendless man gripped by sorrow and forsaken by joy and hope He dreamed of his mother's loving face, of his father, tall and powerful with a lofty brow, of the pleasures of his childhood, the sports, the laughter which made the hills of Surya Mahal ring again , and with these came the recollection of his sweet companion, his dear and loving sister Ah ! would he ever meet that sweet child again, his dear, dear sister ? Where was that happy family now, the beautiful joyous world, the tender sister whom he loved more than his own life ? A tear rolled down his cheek and fell on the ground

In his dreams he opened his eyes He seemed to see Lakshmi beside him, his head resting on her lap, her cool tender hands on his burning forehead, soothing his wounded soul with her soft eyes fixed lovingly on him Ah ! that bright face was now pale with care and sorrow, and her large soft motionless eyes held thoughts of sadness

Raghunath closed his eyes again Another tear drop rolled down his cheek. "Oh God !" he

·murmured, "I have suffered much why make me suffer more with a false hope ? Oh ! let me not go mad "

A kind hand seemed to wipe away the tears
He opened his eyes again It was not a dream
His own dear sister was there under a tree, holding
his head on her lap

A wave of emotion stirred his soul , he took
her hands and placed them on his burning breast
and gazed into her loving eyes He could not
utter a word , copious tears fell from his eyes and
he cried out like a child "O Lakshmi ! Oh, to be
able to see you once again ! Let my happiness, my
hopes be blasted , only give your wretched brother
a little place by your side , he wants nothing
more "

She could not control her feelings She hid
her face to his bosom and gave vent to them in a
flood of tears. Ah, there is no diviner grace on
earth or in heaven that can soothe the overladen
soul than the grace of tears

They remained silent for a long while The
recollections of old days came back to them, their
joys, their sorrows, old memories which found
expression in their flowing tears. There is no
feeling more tender than the love of a sister ,
there is no attachment more pure than the love
of a brother , they are beyond words

Peace came to them like a benediction from

heaven They felt soothed She wiped the tears from his eyes and began to speak "Ishani has answered my prayers, dear brother, and I have at last found you Oh how happy I feel ! Could fate be so kind as to reserve such happiness for such an unfortunate girl as myself !" She then added, "the air is chilly and you may catch a cold here , let us go into the temple, I shall not be able to stay long "

They went inside They sat down beside a pillar , in the darkness, in a low voice they talked of the old days Her soft hands caressed his brow, his face, his arms, and she had so many questions to ask him Raghunath began to tell her his life's story He spoke of his wanderings in different countries after he had escaped from the robbers He had worked in the fields with Mahratta cultivators, had rambled among the hills and valleys with their sheep, and sometimes passed the lonely hours singing the ballads of his native land He would sit by the river and give vent to his feelings through these songs, and sometimes he would enter a lonely forest at early dawn and pour out his heart in a flood of tears He passed a number of years in the hilly country of Konkan, and then took employment under a Mahratta officer and accompanied him to the wars As he grew up he developed a taste for the military profession, and he approached Sivaji and got himself enlisted in

the army He had been in the army for three years, and God was witness, he had scrupulously fulfilled his duty But he had been dismissed by Sivaji on suspicion, which was utterly unfounded, and since then he had aimlessly wandered from place to place Today he had no ambition, he only wished to die like his father in the battle-field and to quit the unfeeling world

Tears flowed from Lakshmi's eyes as she listened to her brother's sad tale She could bear her own sorrows, but those of his brother distressed her At the conclusion of his story she paused to think how she should shape her own She did not utter the name of Chandra Rao Wiping her tears she said "Shortly after I had come to the Mahratta country, a renowned Jaigirdar had married me I cannot mention his name, as a Hindu wife does not utter the name of her husband, but it can be translated as "moon," and his power and glory are like those of the moon, flung far and wide I am happy in my large household, and the kindness and care of my husband have made my life easy I cherish no desire except to see my dear brother happy I came here today to offer my prayers for you and found you lying at the foot of a tree near the temple "

This was the simple story of her life she related to relieve the anxiety and sorrow of her brother. Lakshmi had suffered, and she knew the woman's

art to relieve pain and suffering To suffer in patience and to minister to the sufferings of others has been the traditional duty of the Hindu woman

Many things she said to lift the weight from his mind and to inspire hope and confidence in him "Human life has it ups and downs," she said, "it is never the same We enjoy the good things that God gives us , should we grumble, if He punishes us from time to time Human life is leavened with pain and suffering , we must take them as part of our existence Joy and sorrow come to all and when the heart is laden, we must pray to God to relieve us He gave us happiness in our father's home He dispenses sorrow today , He will dispel the sorrow and give us joy again Dear brother, cast aside your despondency How long can your strength last if you continue in this state Without food and sleep you will soon break down "

"What is the use of life ?" said Raghunath , "the day I was proclaimed a spy, a traitor, why didn't I die ?"

* Do you wish to make your sister unhappy ? I have few in the world left to me , father has gone, mother has gone, and the world is blank Will you refuse the love, the kindness, that I need ? Oh God ! why dost Thou turn Thy face away from me ?"

"Lakshmi, I know you love me tenderly, and may God forsake me when I cause you pain. But, sister, I have no happiness in this life, you are a woman, how can you understand the sufferings of a soldier? A good name is far more dear to us than life, slander and calumny are far more agonizing than death, today I am steeped in disgrace and infamy."

"Then strive to wipe out that disgrace and infamy; go back to the generous-hearted Sivaji, he will listen to you if he is appeased, he will realize you are innocent."

Raghunath made no reply. Blood mounted to his face and his eyes shot fire, he had inherited his father's pride and haughtiness, he would never make an appeal to Sivaji. His sister understood this. "I am a woman," she continued, "forgive me if I have said anything wrong. If you do not wish to go to Sivaji then get back your good name by your deeds. Father used to say, 'deeds proclaim a soldier's courage and loyalty'. If you are suspected as a spy, a traitor, why not destroy that suspicion by the prowess of your sword?"

Raghunath's eyes brightened with a hope, an inspiration. "How?" he asked.

"I hear Sivaji will be going to Delhi, many incidents may occur, and a brave soldier will have many opportunities of revealing his mettle. I am only a woman, I do not understand these things,

if you have your father's courage and resolve, is there any ambition you cannot achieve?"

If Raghunath had not been so obsessed with his own self, he would have known that his sister had a fair knowledge of the workings of the human mind. The remedy she had administered removed at once the weight of despondency and filled his heart with fresh ardour.

There was a long pause. His face began to glow with a new hope. "Lakshmi," he said, "you are a woman, but your words have inspired me with fresh hopes. Ambition has not deserted me. Raghunath is not a traitor, may God help him, he is not a coward. This will yet be proclaimed throughout the land. But you are only a girl, why do I talk thus to you, how will you understand the workings of my heart?"

Lakshmi smiled. She said to herself "I diagnosed the trouble, I gave the medicine, and he tells me I do not know the disease." Aloud she said "Brother, I am so glad you have found a new hope, how can I understand your ambitions? However that may be, but so long as I live I shall always pray for your success in life."

"And so long as I live, Lakshmi, I shall never for a moment forget your affection, your love."

After a long pause she spoke again "Dear brother, there is something else I wish to speak about, but I feel afraid to broach the subject."

"Why should you be afraid, Lakshmi, am I not your own brother?"

"A jumladar named Chandra Rao, I believe, has done you some harm"

His smile faded, his face flushed crimson, but controlling himself he said, "What Chandra Rao said to Raja Sivaji was not untrue I do not know whether he has done me any other harm"

"Whatever he may have done to you, dear brother, promise me you will do nothing to injure him"

Raghunath made no reply He became serious and thoughtful "I have never asked any favour from my brother before this," she pleaded, "this is the only favour I shall ever ask Oh, don't refuse me"

His heart was touched, he took her hands in his and said "Lakshmi, I have a suspicion that Chandra Rao has caused my ruin, but I can deny you nothing I give you my solemn word in this temple of Ishani that I shall do nothing to injure Chandra Rao I forgive him his sins, may God forgive him"

"May God forgive him," repeated Lakshmi fervently

The light of dawn began to tinge the eastern sky After many tears Lakshmi took leave from her brother "Another person is here with me in the temple," she said, "the people at home are

still asleep , I must be back before they wake
Good bye, dear brother May God fulfil your
ambition ”

“May God make you happy ” With these words
he slowly left the temple

Let us now go to the unfortunate Sarayu and
say good bye to her also

CHAPTER XX

SITAPATI GOSWAMI

The reader may have guessed the reason for Raghunath's delay in joining up on the night Rudra Mandal was stormed. He might not return from the conflict. He wished to see Satayu once more, perhaps for the last time, before he went. With many tears she had bade him god-speed.

Some days passed. There was no news of Raghunath. Hope whispered into her ears, "Raghunath has achieved success and won fresh honours, he will soon return with joy in his heart, and eagerly tell her father the story of the great battle." But Raghunath did not return and the story of the battle was not told.

Suddenly, like lightning, the news flashed that Raghunath was a traitor, a spy, and had been humiliated and dismissed from the army. For a moment she remained dazed, she could not fathom the meaning of the words. Then her brow and face flushed crimson, her eyes flamed, and her frail form trembled with emotion. "What did you say? Raghunath a spy?" she cried to her maid-servant. "Raghunath has joined the Afgans? You

are a fool, but why should I waste words on you, go away from here "

The men began to return from the battle, they all repeated the same thing, "Raghunath is a spy," Sarayu's companions echoed the words Janardan, the old priest, said, "Who could imagine that beautiful frank face should conceal such deception and wickedness of heart?" Sarayu heard all, she made no reply. The whole world proclaimed Raghunath a spy, a traitor, but Sarayu's heart said, "The world is a liar sin cannot touch his character "

Some days passed. Sarayu one evening was standing on the shore of an adjacent lake. She noticed in the dim light a Goswami, powerfully built and with long-matted hair, seated near the water's edge. She felt surprised and looked again. His strong frame and long flowing hair seemed to draw her, filling her soul with reverence.

The Goswami turned and fixed his eyes on Sarayu. "Lady," he said after a pause, "can I be of any service to you? Do you come to see me with some unfulfilled desire in your heart? There is sadness on your brow and tears in your eyes "

Sarayū could make no reply. "I believe I understand your purpose," he continued, "you have come to me to ask about some friend "

"Holy man!" she said in a trembling

"your powers are unlimited please tell me something more , that friend is in great distress , please give me news of him "

"The world regards him as a traitor "

"Master, you know all "

"Maharaj Sivaji judged him a spy and dismissed him "

Blood mounted to Sarayu's face as she said, "I may believe that penance and austerities are false, but I shall never believe that Raghunath is a traitor Goswami ! give me leave to depart "

His eyes moistened "I have something more to tell you," he said in a gentle voice

"Yes ?"

"Human eyes cannot read the workings of the human heart There is only one way by which such knowledge can be gained The heart of the beloved reflects the heart of the lover If there is anyone who is truly beloved of Raghunath, go to her, and her heart will reveal the truth "

Sarayu cast her eyes up "Oh God !" she murmured, "I thank Thee , Thou hast given comfort to my soul Whoever aspires to be loved by a man of such lofty character can never for a moment doubt the truth within him "

There was a pause Then he said "From your words it seems that you are the one that Raghunath truly loves I lead a wandering life , it is possible I may meet him again , have you any

message for him ? You have no reason to be bashful , I am outside human society ”

She blushed and then asked, “Have you met him lately ?”

“Last night in the temple of Ishani He has sent me to you ”

‘Tell me what he intends to do now Did he speak of this to you ?’

“He will wipe out the stain from his character by the power of his arm, by his achievements, or die in the attempt ”

“Blessings on his high resolve,” she exclaimed If you should meet him again, tell him, that Sarayu Bala is a Rajput, and she holds honour higher than life , tell him, that so long as she lives she will sing the praises of a virtuous hero God must crown his efforts with success ”

“May God fulfil his desire , but lady, truth does not always triumph, and particularly, the task that Raghunath has undertaken involves danger to his life ”

“That is his profession Tell him that if he loses his life in the performance of his duty, Sarayu will make an offering of her own with a song of praise on her lips ”

There was a long pause, and then Sarayu asked, “Did Raghunath tell you anything else ?”

After musing for a while the Goswami answered, “Yes The world will despise him as a traitor ,

will you give him a place in your heart? The world will never utter his name, will you remember it? Humiliated and scorned and exiled, will Raghunath find a little place in your heart?"

"Master, tell him that Sarayu is a Rajput girl, she will ever be faithful"

"O God! he has then no cause for regret Calumny will not touch him, for he will know there is one who trusts him Now give me leave to depart, Raghunath will be comforted when I tell him what you have said"

"Tell him also, he must carve out a glorious career with his sword, and the great Creator will stand by him"

After a pause Sarayu spoke again "Master, I feel comforted by your words May I know your name?"

"I am known as Sitapati Goswami"

The evening has cast its shadow over the world In the dense darkness the Goswami wends his way alone towards the fortress of Raigarh

CHAPTER XXI.

THE FORTRESS OF RAIGARH

A few days after the event mentioned in the last chapter Sivaji convenes a meeting of his councillors at midnight in Raigarh, the capital of his kingdom. All his great generals, ministers, the high officers of his state, and learned Brahmins are present, and the assembly is also adorned by the presence of renowned warriors, ministers of great wisdom, and white-haired, experienced, lean-bodied philosophers. These men have all along assisted Sivaji with their arms, their wisdom and their talent and learning, and they are as devoted as their master to their motherland which they serve. But the great assembly is silent today, and these men have gathered to bid farewell to their beloved master.

After a length of silence Sivaji spoke. "Peshwaji," he said, addressing Mureshwar, "I have submitted to the Emperor, is it your advice that I should continue under him as a jaigirdar?"

"Sire, you have done all that is possible for a human being to do. Who can frustrate the decree of destiny?"

"Swarna Dev," said Sivaji, "when you built

this large and noble fortress under my orders, did you think it was meant to adorn the capital of a kingdom, or a mere residence of a jaigirdar ?”

“Kshatriya Raj,” said Swarna Dev in sorrowful tones, “you sought freedom by the command of Goddess Bhawani, by her command you have desisted pursuing your purpose. There is no cause for regret. Ishani herself has prohibited a war against a Hindu general.”

“The inevitable has happened, sire,” said Annaji Datta, “your prospective visit to the imperial city should now engage our attention.”

“You are right, Annaji,” said Sivaji, “but it is difficult to abandon the hopes and ambitions I have cherished so long. Look at that long range of hills that shows in the moonlight, as a boy I have wandered over their peaks and through their valleys and have dreamt dreams. Freedom for my motherland, freedom for Bharatvarsha, Hindu Raj spanning the entire land from the Himalayas to the borders of the sea—these were my dreams. Oh Ishani, why didst thou inspire these dreams if they were destined to be mere illusions ?”

Nobody spoke and a hush fell on the assembly. A deep voice broke the silence, it pierced the darkness of a corner of the hall and rang through the tall arches. “Ishani has not deceived you. If man retains his heroism and patience Ishani will help him.”

Startled by the voice Sivaji looked , it was the young Goswami Sitapati who had spoken

A light sparkled in Sivaji's eyes "Goswamiji," he said, "your words fire my ambition and revive my youthful dreams Dadaji Kanai Dev, who was a father to me, lying in his death bed spoke these words 'My boy, the task you have undertaken is noble , there is no nobler task in this world Follow the great path you have chosen , liberate your country , protect the Brahmin, the farmer, the cattle , punish those who desecrate holy temples , follow the lofty ideal which Goddess Ishani has pointed to you' That was twenty years ago , his voice still sounds in my ears Are these words a mere deception ?"

"Kanai Dev's words are not a deception," spoke the Goswami in a ringing voice , "a lofty ideal must achieve lofty results If in the middle of the course we lose heart and cease our efforts, we must blame our own irresolution and cowardice, and not Kanai Dev"

Angry voices resounded through the hall at the word "cowardice," and swords rattled in their scabbards

The Goswami continued to speak in a ringing voice "Sire, pardon my intrusion , forgive me, if I have said anything that is wrong , consult your own heart and judge whether my words are true or false Maharaj, from a mere jaigirdar you

have risen to the status of a lofty sovereign , with your valiant sword you have cleared the path of freedom , you have left marks of your courage in every hill and valley, in every village and forest , can you forget your past achievements ? Will you sacrifice the freedom that is almost won ? The sun of Hindu glory is rising , its light has pierced the darkness and heralds a new day Must it set before its time ? Oh mighty Raja, the Goddess of Fortune and Renown has embraced you Will you cast her away ? I am a man of religion , I cannot claim to advise on worldly matters , judge for yourself ”

Silence fell upon the assembly Sivaji did not speak, but there was fire in his eyes

After a long pause he fixed his eyes on the Goswami and said, “Reverend Brahmin, I have known you only for a short time , I do not know whether you are god or man , your words have a divine inspiration But I wish to know this the power of the Hindu general is immense , he is a master of the art of war, and he has a strong Rajput force What men have we to match his ?”

“The Rajputs are unrivalled in courage, but the Mahratta sword is also strong Jai Singh is a master of the craft of war, but Sivaji also belongs to a noble Kshatriya stock Apprehension of a defeat brings defeat Lion-hearted

warrior, despise all danger, brush aside fate if it is your enemy, and achieve your lofty purpose. There is no Hindu in Bharatvarsha who will not sing your praise, no god in heaven who will not bless and assist you."

"May be," answered Sivaji, "but Hindus will be fighting Hindus, and the land will flow with their blood. Will this be good for the country? Will this be a holy act?"

"And who will be responsible? The man who has fought for his race and religion, or he, who having eaten the bread of the foreigner, has acted as the country's enemy?"

Sivaji made no reply. He was deep in thought, matters of the most serious moment filled his mind. After a long interval he raised his head and spoke slowly, "I know today that there is at least one great hero amongst us and our motherland will never be conquered. Sitapati, there will be war, and in that war a wiser counsellor, a more courageous associate than yourself, I cannot hope to find. But the time has not yet come. I do not anticipate defeat or the destruction of our race, I am opposed to war just now for quite another reason. Listen.

"I have planned many secret ways and means to achieve the great cause to which I am sworn. The foreigner has broken his treaty with us and we are therefore his enemies.

"But I have made peace with Raja Jai Singh who is the staunchest pillar of Hindu religion and a great power in the land I shall not break my word The treaty that I have made with that large-hearted Rajput, so long as I live, I shall never violate

"That virtuous man one day said to me 'If truth fails to protect the pure Hindu religion can deceit protect it?' I have never forgotten those words, I shall never forget them

'If crafty Aurangzeb breaks his treaty with us, I shall then follow your advice, Sitapati, and I can assure you Sivaji's sword will spread terror among the enemy But Sivaji cannot break his faith with that upright man, Jai Singh "

Silence fell upon the assembly After a pause Annaji asked "Sire, have you decided to go to Delhi?"

"I have given my word to Jai Singh that I shall do so "

"Maharaj, you know Aurangzeb's crafty nature Can you trust in him? Why has he asked you to visit him? Surely you understand his purpose "

"Annaji, Raja Jai Singh has given me his word that I incur no risk in visiting Delhi "

"If crafty Aurangzeb should decide to keep you a prisoner or destroy you, how can Jai Singh help you?"

"Aurangzeb will then reap the reward of his treachery. The land of the Mahrattas is a land of heroes, Annaji. If Aurangzeb breaks his faith and acts treacherously, there will be such a blaze of war throughout the Mahratta country that his whole Empire will be burnt down, and the waters of the ocean will not extinguish the flames. The nemesis of treachery must come."

No further attempt was made to dissuade Sivaji from his firm resolve. "Peshwaji Mureshwar and Abaji Swarna Dev," he continued, "I have few friends as staunch as yourselves, none wiser or more efficient throughout the Mahratta country. In my absence you will administer my realm, I shall leave orders to the effect."

They bowed. Then Malasri spoke. "Kshatriya-Raj, I have a prayer to make. From the days of your youth I have ever been by your side. Give me your permission, sire, to accompany you to Delhi."

Sivaji's eyes moistened. "I can refuse you nothing," he said, "you can have your wish."

Then Sitapati spoke. "Sire, let me have your leave to depart. My vows necessitate many pilgrimages. May God keep you safe."

"Goswami, may good fortune attend you in your journeys. I shall remember you when the time of war arrives. I do not hope to find a truer friend than yourself. Such spirit, courage and

heroism in a man of your age I have seldom seen," then heaving a sigh he muttered, "except in another young man"

CHAPTER XXII

THE SONG OF CHAND, THE POET

In the spring of 1666 Sivaji arrives in the precincts of Delhi with only five hundred horse and a thousand foot. He pitches his camp about twelve miles to the south of the city. His men are resting. Has he done well in visiting the imperial city? This thought grips him while he strolls about. Has he done wisely in submitting to the Moslems? Is there no turning back now? He is troubled with a thousand doubts of this kind. The face and brow are furrowed with anxiety which never showed even in his deadliest fights.

By his father is Sambhuji, a spirited lad of nine years. He looks up from time to time at his father, and perhaps has a glimpse of the thoughts that are passing through his mind. They are followed by Raghunath Panta Niaya Sastri, one of Sivaji's old ministers.

After a long interval of silence Sivaji speaks "Have you ever visited Delhi before this?"

"Yes, sire, when I was a child."

"You see that very long wall in the far dis-

tance Your eyes are fixed on it though your thoughts seem far away ”

“Maharaj,” says Niaya Sastri, “That is the great wall of the fortress built by Prithu Rai, the last Hindu Emperor of Delhi ”

His countenance lights up with an expression of wonder “Is that Prithu Rai’s fortress ? The last Hindu Emperor ruled there Those glorious days have passed like a dream, Niaya Sastri The light of the day fades, but the dawn proclaims the advent of a new day , the fading leaves of the winter yield to the fresh petals of the spring , our glories have passed , will they never again return ?”

“There is nothing impossible if God wills it. May He restore the glories of the past through your mighty effort ”

“Niaya Sastri,” says Sivaji, “do you remember the tales, the songs of Chand, the poet, we used to listen to in Konkan in the days of our childhood ? That broken-down citadel held lofty palaces and teemed with happy men and women , it was a city of tall archways, flags and festoons The monarch is on his throne, adorned by his warriors who stand around , streets and ghats, houses and courtyards, the banks of the river, are resplendent and vocal with happy voices as on a festive occasion. The spacious bazaars are filled with buyers and sellers , the public gardens resound with the music

of singers and dancers , women are carrying water from the lake , royal troops in bright uniform, the cavalry and elephants, are ranged in front of the palace, and martial music fills the air The morning sun pours its golden light upon the beautiful scene At this moment enters the envoy of Muhammad Ghorī Do you remember the story, my faithful minister ?”

“Maharaj,” says Niaya Sastri, “I remember the tale recited by the poet Chand I should love to hear it from your lips ”

“The messenger says to Emperor Prithu Rai— Maharaj, Mahammad Ghorī will agree to a peace if you consent to divide your kingdom with him ”

The Emperor replies “I shall do so when the sun consents to divide his sovereignty of the sky with another sun ”

The foreign envoy speaks again, “Maharaj,” he says, “a treaty has been made between Muhammad Ghorī and your father-in law On the battle-field you will meet Moslem and Rathor forces ”

“Convey my respectful greetings to my father-in law and tell him I shall soon meet him to salute the dust of his feet ”

Chohan troops emerge from yonder fortress Moslem and Rathor forces disperse like flying dust before Prithu Rai , Muhammad Ghorī, wounded, flees from the field of Tiraurī and saves his life

“Niaya Sastri,” continued Sivaji, “that day is gone Today, who will sing or hear the songs of the poet Chand ? But still, standing in front of that ancient citadel, when I recall the undying fame of our ancestors, a new hope fills my heart, like a dream This vast land of ancient renown will not remain forever steeped in darkness I see the flaming dawn of a new day God restores the sick to health and gives strength to the weak , He will raise our feeble Mother from the dust in which she lies ”

CHAPTER XXIII

RAM SINGH

Sivaji and his son were in their tent when a sentinel entered and announced that Prince Ram Singh, Raja Jai Singh's son, with a single escort had arrived to welcome them to Delhi. Sivaji ordered them to be received courteously and admitted.

"Father, only two men have been sent to escort you to Delhi," exclaimed Sivaji's spirited son.

Sivaji was deeply annoyed at what appeared to be a deliberate insult, but he said nothing. Ram Singh entered the tent. The prince was like his father, brave, spirited, frank and truthful. Sivaji in a moment gathered his straightforward and generous nature from his looks, but in the course of conversation he wished to ascertain, if possible, whether Aurangzeb had any designs on him and whether he would be safe in Delhi. The prince had heard a great deal about the courage and power of Sivaji, and he gazed with admiration at the renowned Mahratta hero. Sivaji embraced the prince and received him with respect and cordiality.

"Maharaj!" said the prince, "I have never had

the good fortune of meeting you before I have heard so much of your glory and renown from my father, I feel deeply honoured and gratified at meeting the virtuous and patriotic hero of the Mahrattas "

"I am also fortunate," replied Sivaji, "there are few in Rajasthan as virtuous and open-hearted as your father, it is a sign of good luck to have met you on my way to Delhi "

"Maharaj, the Emperor has sent me to welcome you to Delhi. If you will kindly let me know when it will suit Your Highness to enter the city "

"What do you advise, Prince ?"

"Morning would be the best time, sire," answered the prince innocently, "the day will be hot and may cause you great discomfort "

Sivaji smiled "You have not quite grasped my meaning. You live in Delhi and have all the news of the place. You must know whether I would do wisely to enter the city "

Ram Singh understood what was passing in Sivaji's mind. "Forgive me, my mistake," he said, "in your position I would stay away in my hills and place my faith in my sword, there is no truer friend than the sword. But I am only a messenger. Since my father has advised you to come to Delhi, that must be a wise course. He is a very intelligent man and his advice never goes wrong "

Evidently no designs had yet been formed to lay hands on his person, or at any rate, the prince knew nothing about the matter. So Sivaji thought as he replied, "Yes, your father advised me to come, and further, he made a promise to me of which you may be aware."

"Yes, sire, he has told me that he gave his word that you would suffer no harm, incur no peril in visiting Delhi."

"What is your opinion, Prince?"

"The word of a Rajput never fails and can be relied upon. I shall do my utmost to carry out his promise and secure your safe return from Delhi."

Sivaji felt easy. Dispelling his doubts he said with a smile, "I shall follow your advice, we shall start now for the day will be hot."

They commenced their journey.

The route was lined with ancient dismantled Mahomedan buildings. After capturing the throne the Moslems first established their capital near Prithu Rai's ancient citadel, and the remains of their ancient buildings and mausoleums were seen at this spot. The famous Kutb Minar, which towers over the other structures, is situated here. In course of time other buildings and palaces rose and the city travelled northwards. Sivaji saw innumerable mansions, mausoleums and minars, broken-down columns and tombs as he proceeded

to his destination Ram Singh acted as his guide and described each scene as they passed along. As they chatted they came to understand each other, and a strong bond of friendship sprung up between Sivaji and Ram Singh. "If I have any trouble in Delhi I shall have at least one true friend," thought Sivaji.

They passed the lofty mausoleums of the Lodi dynasty, each tomb graced with a high dome. This was the city of the last Afgan Kings, later, the city moved further north.

Humayun's tall mausoleum next came into view, and then the famous *Chausat Khamba*, a spacious graceful structure built of white marble and supported on sixty four tall columns from which the name is derived. Then followed a field of tombs. Travelling from Prithu Rai's citadel to Moghul Delhi Sivaji beheld a continuous history of the period carved in stone, each tomb was a letter, and each palace and mansion a page of the history, of which the writer was Time, which alone can inscribe in such letters.

They went along. Near the great wall of Moghul Delhi Ram Singh proudly pointed to a lofty structure. "That", he said, "is the great observatory built by my father where famous astronomers watch the stars and make their calculations."

"Your father is as wise as he is brave, there

are few who combine so many virtues , I am told that he has built an observatory in holy Kasi also ”

At the entrance of the Moghul city Sivaji's heart fluttered , he stopped his steed , he looked behind “I am still free , in a moment I may be a prisoner ” Then suddenly he remembered his promise to Jai Singh, he gazed at the frank and open countenance of his son and glanced at the sword by his side, and entered the portal At that moment he lost his freedom

CHAPTER XXIV

THE CITY OF DELHI

Delhi appears very beautiful today. The Emperor does not generally indulge in pomp and splendour, but he is fully aware that certain occasions demand a display of magnificence. Today Sivaji has arrived from a poor country to the rich capital of the Moghul Empire. He will realize his own insignificance and poverty if the wealth and riches of the Moghuls are flashed before his eyes, and see the futility of a war against them. By the Emperor's command, therefore, Delhi assumes a gaudy magnificence, in dress and colour, like a woman on a festive occasion.

Sivaji and Ram Singh proceed along the broad highway. The city teems with life, the streets swarm with pedestrians and men on horse-back. Vast quantities of expensive commodities are displayed in the shops—priceless gold and silver ornaments, tempting confectionary and decorative articles. Flags and festoons fill the sky, gaily dressed people crowd the verandahs, and curious women peep from windows for a glimpse of the renowned Mahratta warrior, as he passes by.

Carriages, litters, elephants, horses, rajas, mansabdars, sheks, amirs and omras—a gaudy throng fill the thoroughfares, steeds at full gallop pass by, and stately elephants with pendulous trunks, caparisoned in gold-brocaded crimson cloth move majestically through the crowd, litter men with their musical voices intone the rank and dignity of their burden. Sivaji has never before beheld such a city. Alas! poor Poona, poor Raigarh! They pale into insignificance.

As they pass Ram Singh points to a grandiose structure with three tall domes. “That”, he says, “is Jumma Musjid, Emperor Shah Jahan has built the wealth and art of the world into that sumptuous building, there is no other mosque on earth to compare with it.”

Sivaji gazes with wonder at the long sweep of a blood-red stone structure surmounted by three lofty domes of pure white marble, on either side stand two slender graceful minars that merge into the sky.

On the opposite side of this wonder-edifice is the royal palace and the far-extending red stone wall of the citadel. Behind the fortress lies the river Jumna, and in front, the broad kingsway thronged with noisy traffic. There was no place in Bharatvarsha, or perhaps in the world, at that time which might rival Delhi in splendour and magnificence. Flags and festoons wave their gay colours

above the battlements, proclaiming the power and glory of the Moghul Empire. At the gateway of the fortress appears a large tent. It belongs to a mansabdar who keeps the gate. Soldiers are drawn up in front of the citadel, their bayonets trimmed with flags flash in the sunlight. Commodities of every description are being bought and sold in front of the citadel. The Broadway between the fortress and the mosque is a sea of sound and traffic. Horsemen, men on elephants and in litters, the titled nobility of Bharatvarsha, and a miscellaneous crowd pass and repass through the great portal of the fortress. Their bright costumes dazzle the eye, their happy voices resound through the air. Drowning the noise of traffic is heard the roar of the fortress guns that proclaims the might and glory of the Moghul Emperor to the world. With startled eyes Sivaji gazes on this scene, then slowly passes through the gateway with Ram Singh by his side.

The sight within causes him greater amazement. Innumerable craftsmen and artisans are engaged in the manufacture of articles for the royal household. Rich cloths with gold and silver brocades, malmal, muslin, chintz, priceless carpets, awnings, tents and purdahs, graceful turbans, shawls and scarfs, jewelled ornaments for begums, marble articles for household decoration, stoneware toys of various kinds, blue, yellow,

red and green—a rhapsody of extatic art, these cause numbing bewilderment and paralyse the brain. The best artists of Bharatvarsha have been salaried and they manufacture and supply every requisite for the royal household.

Sivaji can only glimpse the scene around him. He threads his way through the crowd towards Dewan-i-Am or the public audience hall, a lofty and spacious structure built of red stone. The Emperor generally convenes his council in this place, but today, in order to impress Sivaji with the sumptuous splendour of his palaces, he holds his court in Dewan-i-Khas or Private Audience Hall, a superb structure, exquisitely, ornamented, of pure white marble. Within the hall Aurangzeb is seated on the Peacock throne, built of gems and precious stones that cast a dust of dazzling coloured lights around. A silver railing separates him from the nobility of his court—rajas, omras, mansabdars and generals, who stand around in silence. Prince Ram Singh announces Sivaji.

Sivaji had guessed Aurangzeb's object in decorating the city, now he fully understood it. He had preserved the liberty of his people for twenty years by constant fighting, and recently, after acknowledging the suzerainty of Aurangzeb, he had materially assisted him in his wars, he had now come to pay his respects to the Emperor. And what was the reception that was accorded to

him? He remained standing like an ordinary servant of the crown. His blood boiled within him, but he was helpless now. Like so many others holding common appointments he made his *taslim* to the Emperor and offered the customary *nuzzar*. Aurangzeb's object was achieved. The world realised that Sivaji was not of the same status as Aurangzeb, he was no more than an ordinary officer of the state, an ordinary person trying his strength against a powerful master.

Aurangzeb accepted the *nuzzar* and without further attention offered him a place among the *panch hazari* title holders. These men were entitled to maintain a force of five thousand under their command. Flames burst from Sivaji's eyes and his body trembled with rage. Biting his lips he exclaimed, "Sivaji a *panch hazari*! When you come to my country, Emperor, you will see the number of *panch hazaris* that Sivaji commands and the power they wield."

After the business of the court was concluded the emperor rose and entered the palace of the begums—a tall white stone-built structure close by. The assembly dispersed, and the crowd streamed out of the fortress gate, each one making his way to his own destination. Within a short time the city was normal.

A house had been assigned for Sivaji's residence. Insulted and humiliated, he entered it in

a towering rage, sat down and commenced to think

A little later news reached him that the Emperor had overheard the angry words that Sivaji had uttered in the royal court. The Emperor did not wish to punish him, but henceforth Sivaji would have no place in his court or audience with him.

Sivaji realised that future skies were dark. Shrewd Aurangzeb had laid a trap for him into which he had fallen, and like a lion he had been caught and caged. Would he ever get back to freedom? "O, Sitapati Goswami!" he exclaimed, "you advised to continue the fight, your stirring words still ring in my ears. Aurangzeb beware. Sivaji has so far acted straight with you. Avoid craft, for Sivaji is not quite a child in that art. If duplicity is your game, I swear to Bhawani I shall raise such a blaze in the Mahratta country, such a conflagration of war throughout the land, that your beautiful city of Delhi, nay, the whole of your mighty Empire, will sink to ashes."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE NOCTURNAL VISITOR

Within a few days Sivaji clearly saw Aurangzeb's designs on him. Sivaji must not be allowed to return to his country, he must be kept in Delhi, the Mahrattas must never have a chance of achieving their freedom—this was the Emperor's policy. Sivaji was deeply annoyed, but subduing his feelings he concentrated on plans of his escape.

He discussed these plans and such matters with his trusty minister Raghunath Panta Niaya Sastri, and after a great deal of consultation they decided it would be best to approach the Emperor direct for permission to leave Delhi before making any attempt to leave the city stealthily.

Niaya Sastri was not only very wise but he was a master in the art of persuasion. He agreed to take Sivaji's application to the Emperor. The reasons that necessitated Sivaji's return to his own country were set out in detail. Sivaji's achievements on behalf of the Emperor and the promises made by the latter which induced him to come to Delhi, were also clearly mentioned. He concluded

by stating he was still ready to perform everything he had undertaken, and to assist the Emperor to the best of his powers, to extend the Moghul Empire over the kingdoms of Bijapur and Golconda. If, however, the Emperor did not need his assistance, Sivaji might be permitted to return to his own *jaagir*, as the air and water of Hindusthan were detrimental to his health and that of his men who had accompanied him to Delhi.

Raghunath Niaya Sastri himself carried the application to the Emperor's palace. Aurangzeb sent a reply which contained a great many things, but not a word regarding the permission to depart which Sivaji had sought. Sivaji was now convinced that it was the Emperor's intention to keep him a life-long prisoner and began to devise means for his escape.

We find him one evening, a few days after this event, seated alone and thoughtful in his room close to a window overlooking the street. The sun has set but there is still light in the sky, and a continuous traffic flows in the street. Men from different countries in various costumes have come to Delhi on their separate businesses. Fair-bodied haughty Moghuls, hundreds of dark-skinned Hindus and Mussalmans, Africans also, though few in number, are seen passing along the thoroughfare. Merchants from Persia, Arabia, Tartary and Turkey have come to the wealthy city in search

of gain Mohamedans and Hindus of all ranks, generals, rajas, mansabdars, on elephants, horses and litters fill the road , passing hawkers with their stock-in-trade on their heads proclaim aloud the virtues of their goods , besides these, a vast miscellaneous crowd passes up and down the street like the conflicting currents in a river

Gradually the crowd subsides, the shops begin to close, and the great hum of the city dies down. A few lights begin to appear through windows and the sea of distant houses slowly merges in the darkness that is settling on the city. The crimson light in the west has faded and a few stars appear in the sky. On the east lies the broad and peaceful Jumna stretching from the distant horizon and flowing seaward.

In the stillness of the evening rose the holy notes of *Azan* in the Jumma Musjid. It spread over the hum of human voices, drew the human soul, and mounted slowly into the sky. Sivaji listened to the deep music of the holy call that floated in the evening air. He looked. The three spotless white domes of the mosque were silhouetted against the dark sky, and the massive red walls appeared like a distant line of hills. The rest was darkness, and a deep hush had fallen upon the city.

The night deepened but the flow of his thought continued , his mind turned back to the days

gone by The friends of his boyhood, the hopes of his youth, his courage, his efforts, Sahajī, his noble father, Dadajī Kanai Dev who had reared him with paternal affection and care, his high-souled mother, Jijī,—memories of these crowded into his brain That brave women had predicted victory for the Mahrattas, had inspired in him a resolve for heroic achievements, had given him heart in difficulties and had exhorted him in his battles

And then the ambitions of his youth, his series of achievements, the storming of castles, the conquest of countries and kingdoms, his wonderful victories, his irresistible prowess and his soaring ambition Sivajī glanced back across a period of twenty years, and every year held a bright picture of his wonderful victories and heroic exploits

Were all his achievements a mere futility ? His ambition a fantastic illusion ? No The star of glory still burned in the future skies , the sun of the Moslem Empire must set, and the royal umbrella would yet wave over a broad and extended Hindu Raj—a spreading Hindu monarchy

While these thoughts were passing through his mind the bells of the palace *nagarakhana* struck nine The chimes rang out in the stillness of the night, across the city and over

the surrounding country The echoes had not died away when the tall figure of a man appeared near the open window where Sivaji was seated—a silent figure against the background of a dark sky

Sivaji stood up, cast a keen glance at the man and drew his sword The stranger took no notice of him, stepped in through the window, and deliberately wiped his face which was wet with the evening dew

Long flowing hair covered his head and the back of his neck, his body was besmeared with ashes, he carried no weapons Evidently he had no evil designs Who was he ?

The room was dark The stranger fixed his eyes on Sivaji and greeted him "Victory to the Maharaja !" he exclaimed

Sivaji recognised the stranger There are few true friends in the world, and a true friend in time of peril fills the heart with extatic joy It was Sitapati Goswami Sivaji made his obeisance and embraced him, offered him a seat, lighted a lamp and then addressed him "My dearest friend," he said, "give me the news of Raigarh , when did you come here and why, and what brings you to me at this time of the night ?"

"Maharaj," replied Sitapati, "everything must be well in Raigarh , the administration has been

placed in very capable hands and nothing can go wrong But I bring no news from Raigarh for I left the place shortly after your departure I have to travel from place to place for the fulfilment of my vow , I mentioned this before On my way to Mathura and other places of pilgrimage I have stopped in Delhi, and it is my good fortune to meet you once again

"Yes, but you would not step in through a window on a dark night just to see me unless you had some particular reason "

"I shall presently mention it, but I trust Your Highness is well "

"Well, so far as the body is concerned," answered Sivaji, "but how can I be well among enemies ?"

"Peace exists between the Emperor and Your Highness, so you cannot have any enemies "

"Yes, peace between a snake and a frog," exclaimed Sivaji "Sitapati, you must know all Why do you make me blush with shame? If I had listened to your advice I would be a free man 'oday in my hills in Konkan, and not a prisoner in Delhi

"Master," said Sitapati, "avoid self-reproach , man must err , the world is full of errors And in this matter you are in no way to blame You have come to this place relying on the sanctity of the treaty between the Emperor and

yourself , God will punish the man, who has been guilty of breaking that treaty Craft never triumphs The punishment of Aurangzeb's crime will be his destruction and the destruction of his dynasty Maharaj, your men remember the memorable words you uttered in Raigarh 'If Aurangzeb breaks his faith and acts treacherously there will be such a conflagration of war throughout the Mahratta country that his whole empire will be burnt down' Those were your words "

Sivaji's eyes gleamed with a fierce joy "Sitapati," he said, "I still cherish that hope , Aurangzeb will realize that the spirit of my nation is still high , but alas, when the great war breaks, I shall not be with my men, but a silent prisoner in Delhi "

"Aurangzeb can no more keep you a prisoner within the walls of Delhi than he can imprison the free winds of the heavens "

Sivaji smiled "You have perhaps planned a means of my escape which may account for your visit at this time of the night," he said

"Nothing can be hidden from your penetrating vision, master "

"What is the plan ?"

"You can safely leave your house in a disguise on a dark night Delhi is protected by high walls, but on the eastern side iron pegs have been

planted in the wall, it will not be difficult for a Mahratta soldier to negotiate these. On the opposite side stands a swift boat manned by eight stalwart men which will quickly take you to Mathura. You have many friends there, many temples and trusty priests, to return to your country from there will be a simple matter."

"I am grateful for your exertions, Sitapati. This is another proof of your true friendship, but I may be detected when attempting to scale the wall, and then my death is certain."

"There are ten archers, deadly shots, among your troops near the spot where the iron pegs have been fixed, if anybody tries to obstruct you, he will not survive the attempt."

"The boat may arouse suspicion."

"The eight men in the boat are your own soldiers, they have protective armour and their quivers are full. There is no likelihood of any obstruction."

"Friends are rare in this world, Sitapati, I may not have a staunch friend in Mathura."

"Your Peshwa's brother-in-law is in Mathura. He can be trusted, you know that. I have come to you direct from him, he has made all the necessary arrangements. Here is his letter."

With these words Sitapati produced a document and placed it in Sivaji's hands. Sivaji smiled and handed it back. "Read it out to me," he said.

Sitapati realized his mistake. He remembered that Sivaji could not even sign his own name, he had never learnt to read and write.

Sitapati read out the letter which set out in detail all the arrangements that had been made by Mureshwar's brother-in-law.

"Goswami, it is difficult to think that religious rites alone have occupied all your time. My chief minister could not have fixed up a more perfect plan, which has been worked out to its minutest detail. But there is just one thing I wish to know. I may effect my escape, but what will happen to my son, my trusty minister, Raghunath Panta, my dear friend Tannaji Malasri? And my trusty men, how will they escape the wrath of Aurangzeb?"

"Your son, your dear friend and your minister can accompany you," said Sitapati, "your troops can safely remain in Delhi, what can Aurangzeb do to them? He must release them in the end."

"Sitapati, you don't know Aurangzeb, he reached the throne through the blood of his brothers."

"When your men hear of your escape, there is not one amongst them who will not cheerfully submit to any punishment that Aurangzeb may inflict."

There was a pause, then Sivaji spoke slowly

and deliberately "Sitapati," he said, "I shall always be grateful to you for your exertions on my behalf, but this cannot be, Sivaji will never desert the soldiers who have trusted him, he can never be guilty of such cowardice Sitapati, think of some other plan "

"There is no other plan "

"Then give me time, Sitapati This is not the first time that Sivaji finds himself in a scrape, and he has wits enough to find a way out '

"There is no time for that Master, make your escape tonight Tomorrow, you cannot escape "

"You may have learnt this through some miraculous power you possess, but Sivaji's answer remains the same He will never save his life leaving his dependants in danger Goswami, such an act would strike against Kshatriya honour and morality

"Sire, Kshatriya honour and morality demand the punishment of those who break their word Aurangzeb must be punished Go back to your country, raise a storm of war, and like mountain waves sweep over the land Aurangzeb's happy dreams will cease, and his corrupt empire will melt in the ocean tides of war

"The King of the universe will punish treachery," replied Sivaji "Believe me, the retribution

will come swiftly Sivaji will not desert those who have trusted him "

"Master, there is still time , abandon your resolve, reconsider your decision, and give the word Tomorrow will be too late , tomorrow you will be a prisoner "

"Be it so Sivaji will never desert those who have depended upon him His decision is made "

Sitapati made no reply Sivaji noticed tears in his eyes He took his hand kindly and said "Goswami, do not be displeased with me , I shall never forget your kindness, your attachment, and your love , I shall always remember the inspiring words you uttered in Raigarh, and your exertions here for my release Stay with me, Sitapati, and with your help and advice I shall find a way out of this difficulty "

"Master, I am deeply grateful for your kind words God knows, nothing would please me more than to remain by your side always But my vow cannot be broken , for its fulfilment I have to travel through many lands, many countries It is impossible for me to stay here "

"Sitapati, I do not understand this extraordinary and rigorous vow of yours? Explain it to me "

After a pause Sitapati spoke "Destiny" he

have worshipped from my childhood, who has filled my life with inspiration, and whose name has been like a prayer on my lips—I have courted his wrath. I have made an austere vow in order to efface the evil writing on my brow ”

“Who has told you this, and who has prescribed the remedy, the great penance you have undertaken ?”

Events have disclosed the evil to me In the temple of Ishani there was one who pointed out my path and inspired the oath If I am successful, I shall reveal all to you If I fail, I shall part with a life which will no longer be needed What is life worth if all our efforts to propitiate the god whom we love and worship fail ?”

“What you say is only too true, Sitapati There is no grief more poignant than that caused by the resentment of those whom we love and serve ”

“Sire, have you been so unfortunate as to experience such a grief ?”

“God forgive me, Sitapati I have made an innocent lad suffer The thought gives me great pain ”

“What is his name ?”

“Raghunathji Havildar ”

The lamp suddenly flickered out Sivaji rose to light it “A light is not needed,” said Sitapati, “pray proceed ”

"The story is short Three years have passed The lad comes to me and joins my army—a fine frank face, bright eyes, a lofty brow, like yours Younger, and less wise than yourself, he is your rival in courage and heroism Your tall figure, your clear voice, your spirit and enthusiasm, remind me of him "

"Pray proceed "

"I recognized his quality the day I met him I made a gift of one of my own swords to him That sword is bright with the honours he won He followed me like a shadow in times of peril , in a battle he was always in the front line I can still see his tall striking form, his flowing hair, his bright, frank eyes "

"Pray proceed "

"That lad saved my life on one occasion On another, his courage won a mountain fortress In many a fight he proved his metal of a brave soldier "

"Pray proceed "

"Why ask any more ? One day in a fit of temper I insulted him and dismissed him. He never spoke an angry word , he respectfully bowed and left "

Sivaji stopped speaking His voice revealed the deep emotion that stirred his heart There was a long pause , then Sitapati spoke

"Why should you regret your act ? If he was guilty, he deserved punishment "

"Guilty ! Guilt cannot touch his splendid character I made a dreadful mistake , why, I cannot tell He was late in joining up when we were launching an attack I took him for a spy Raja Jai Singh investigated the matter later Raghunath had gone to seek the blessings of a holy priest , that was why he was late. I humiliated and insulted an innocent lad , this caused his death, so I have heard I have killed the man who saved my life "

Sivaji stopped speaking There was a long pause

"Sitapati !"

There was no reply He rose and lighted the lamp Sitapati was not in the room

CHAPTER XXVI.

AURANGZEB

Next morning at 9 o'clock Sivaji woke up. A noise in the street attracted his attention. He looked out of the window, and what he saw filled him with apprehension.

The house was surrounded by armed police, and every person entering or leaving it was being carefully examined. He remembered Sitapati's words: "Tomorrow will be too late, you will be a prisoner."

Sivaji commenced to make inquiries. He learnt that his application to leave the city had aroused the suspicion of Aurangzeb, who had given orders to the police to watch his house and to shadow his movements. Sitapati must have heard of this, and had therefore come to warn him and help his escape. Sivaji felt very grateful to the Goswami.

Aurangzeb's move was now quite apparent. With sweet words and promises he had lured Sivaji to Delhi, once there, he had openly humiliated him in the royal court, which was henceforth closed to him, prohibited his return to

his own country, and later, made him a prisoner. The python tightens its coils round the body of its victim, crushes it, and then slowly devours it. Aurangzeb also who had trapped Sivaji, would gradually crush him and destroy him by slow degrees. The whole truth flashed before Sivaji, and he groaned in uncontrollable wrath. Restlessly he paced his room, his lips compressed, his eyes aflame. "Aurangzeb," he muttered, "you do not know Sivaji, you think you are a master of craft and cunning, but in this art Sivaji is not quite a novice. I shall repay this debt some day, that day India will blaze up from the Deccan to Hindusthan."

He remained deep in thought for a long while and then sent for his trusty minister Raghunath Panta. Old Niaya Sastri came in and took his seat. "O wise and trusty friend," said Sivaji, "you see Aurangzeb's game, we must play the same game, thanks to you, Sivaji has also learnt to play it. Last night I learnt that we would be made prisoners, but I did not wish to make my escape and leave my men behind. I want your advice on this matter."

After considering the matter Niaya Sastri spoke. "Sire, I think the Emperor should be approached with a petition to permit your men to return to their own country. You are now a prisoner, and I think the Emperor will be glad to see your

followers away from you I believe such an application will be granted ”

“Your advice is excellent , I also believe that crafty Aurangzeb will make no objection to my men leaving Delhi ”

An application, as suggested, was prepared and sent to the Emperor Things turned out just as they had anticipated Aurangzeb was happy to learn that Sivaji wanted to send away his soldiers from Delhi, and granted the necessary permits Sivaji received them within a few days. “Fool !” muttered Sivaji to himself, “you will keep Sivaji a prisoner? It is easy for me to escape in disguise from Delhi with one of these permits , but let all my men go first , I shall find a way out for myself ”

Reader, let us now enter the palace and get a glimpse of Emperor Aurangzeb His shrewdness and duplicity, combined with military talent, had outwitted and subdued his brothers, and smoothed his path to the Peacock throne of Delhi His rule extended over the whole of Hindusthan and beyond, from Kashmir to Bengal , his conquering armies were operating in the Deccan, for he would extend his sway to the south and build up a mighty Empire over the whole of India Let us visit this remarkable man who out-played Sivaji in his own game of shrewdness, and held him a prisoner in Delhi

The day's duties have been done, and the great Emperor is now resting in his *gosalkhana*. This is a large room, the place where he holds secret conferences with his ministers, but he is alone today. His countenance displays a variety of feelings, deep thought that makes lines on his brow, anger that lights the eyes, self-pride and steel resolve, or self-satisfaction over some object achieved, that relaxes the features into a smile. What is he thinking of? Of himself perhaps, the builder of a mighty Empire, or perhaps of some plan to dishonour the Hindu religion, or to reduce the brave Rajputs and the Mahrattas to slavery. Is he jubilating over the capture of Sivaji? We do not know. The suspicious monarch never reveals his mind to even his most trusted friend or minister. His own genius would move his men like pawns, and control every detail of the complex administration of which he was the head. That is his ambition. His own brains would bear the entire burden of the mighty government, like the serpent Basuki which supports the world on his head. He does not desire the advice of others.

While Aurangzeb is busy with his thoughts a member of the royal council is announced. This is Danesh Manda. The Emperor orders him to be admitted, smooths his brow, and assumes a smiling face.

Danesh Manda was not a minister, and seldom ventured to impart advice to Aurangzeb. But he was a master of the Persian and Arabic languages and so had earned the respect of the Emperor, who in the course of conversation would sometimes consult him on matters of state. His opinion was always frank and straight-forward, so much so, that when Dara, the elder brother of the Emperor, was in prison, he had strongly advised that he should be spared. This did not suit Aurangzeb's purpose. He regarded Danesh as a foolish and short-sighted man, but nevertheless, respected him for his learning, wealth, and the reputation that he had built up for himself. He always received him courteously. The old man saluted the Emperor and took his seat.

"Your Majesty will pardon me for intruding at this hour, when after the day's strenuous work your mind and body require rest. But I have ventured to do so because you have always been very kind to me. As the Persian poet says 'All living creatures may always gaze up to the sun, but the monarch of the heavens, unperturbed, accepts their reverence at all times, and showers on them his munificent rays' "

"Danesh Manda," replied the Emperor with a smile, "I will not speak about others, but you are always welcome "

Courteous words were exchanged "Your

Majesty will justify the name of Alamgir which you bear. The whole of Hindusthan is at your feet, and the conquest of Southern India will follow shortly.

"Why, what makes you say so?" asked the Emperor."

"Your greatest enemy of the Deccan is in your power."

"You refer to Sivaji? Yes, the rat has been trapped."

Realizing that he had said too much, Aurangzeb added "Danesh Manda, you know my desire, I have always wished to honour the great men of the land. Sivaji may be a crafty enemy, but he is a great fighter. I invited him to Delhi, and I intended to do him honour before he departed, but fool as he is, he could not conduct himself with propriety in the royal court. I do not wish to imprison or destroy him, I have only forbidden him my court. I have now learnt that he has intercourse with sanyasis and spies, and in order to prevent mischief, I have ordered him to be watched. I intend to honour him and let him depart shortly."

"I feel deeply gratified to learn of Your Majesty's decision."

"Why, how does this concern you?"

"I cannot presume to express any opinion of my own, but if your treatment of Sivaji were not

generous, malicious people would say that you had invited him to Delhi in order to imprison him ”

This remark irritated the monarch, but he suppressed his feelings “Danesh Manda, the words of evil-minded men will not affect the Emperor’s reputation, but justice and mercy are the ornaments of my court Justice demands that Sivaji should be warned, mercy will confer upon him the honours due and permit him to depart in peace ”

“These were the characteristics, sire, if you will permit me to say so, of the administration of the father of your grand-father—the Great Akbar Justice and mercy will highten your fame and increase your power ”

“Explain that to me more fully,” said the Emperor

“Nothing is unknown to you, sire When Akbar mounted the throne his small kingdom bristled with enemies Rajasthan, Bihar, and the the Deccan were fiercely hostile, and Delhi itself was not free from his foes When he died, he had not an enemy, and peace reigned within his mighty Empire Those who were his deadly enemies—the Rajputs—accepted his benign rule and carried his victorious flag from Kabul to Bengal And how was victory achieved? By might? By physical force alone? There is none of the dynasty of Timur that lacks courage and power,

yet none has been able to achieve such a mighty result as Akbar. A magnanimous, generous policy achieved this miracle. His attitude towards the enemies was always noble, he trusted the Hindus and they in return endeavoured to be worthy of his trust. Man Singh, Todar Mull, Birbal and others became the pillars of the Moslem Empire. Distrust a righteous man, and in course of time he ceases to be trust-worthy, trust the despised Kafer, and he rises to be worthy of trust. This is human nature, so the sacred books say. Sivaji has achieved much on your behalf in the Deccan. Believe me, sire, if you trust and honour him, he will be a strong pillar of the Moghul Empire in Southern India.'

The reader will now have guessed the reason of Danesh Manda's visit. Hindus and Mahomedans, wise and loyal, strongly disapproved Aurangzeb's action in luring Sivaji to Delhi and detaining him. The Emperor held Danesh Manda in respect, and the latter wished in the course of conversation to show him the error of his ways. Danesh was anxious that Sivaji should be courteously treated and sent home with the honours due to his rank and position. He did not know that it was easier to move a mountain than to divert the Emperor from the firm resolve and purpose he had set his heart upon.

Danesh Manda's words of wisdom. Aurangzeb

treated as utterly foolish "Yes," he answered with a smile, "Danesh Manda has read human nature as deeply as his own religious books We shall make Sivaji a pillar of strength in Southern India, hostile Rajputs are already a magnificent pillar in Rajputana, we shall confer freedom on Kashmir, and courteously invite the Afghans to resume their sovereignty over Bengal Our mighty Moghul Empire will then rest on these four splendid columns "

Danesh Manda's countenance became red He spoke slowly "I have received kindness from your revered father, and great kindness from Your Majesty I have therefore, taken the liberty of expressing my opinion, otherwise I would not have presumed to do so "

Aurangzeb regarded Danesh Manda as foolish but straightforward man He liked him for his frankness He saw he was pained, and spoke to him gently "Please do not take offence at what I have said, Danesh Akbar was undoubtedly a very wise man, but in trying to level up the Kafers with the Moslems he built up religion which would suit both, and what religion? Another thing I wish to say We know that even in the trivial matters of our daily life the work we do with our own hands is more efficient than that done by others, the task of managing a very complicated and elaborat

system of government can likewise be done more efficiently by ourselves than by depending on others. If I can in my own person, with my own power, rule the whole of *Bharatvarsha*, why should I depend upon the Kafers. Aurangzeb from his boyhood has trusted in the strength of his own sword, with his sword he cleared his path to the throne, he will govern the land by means of his sword, he will not seek assistance, he will trust nobody."

"Domestic duties, sire, can be performed, but is it possible to administer a vast empire without the assistance of others? You cannot be present in Bengal, in the Deccan and other places at the same time. How can work go on unless others are entrusted with its performance?"

"I shall have my servants to do the work, but they shall always remain servants, they must never be allowed to become masters. I give a man power today, he will use that power against me tomorrow, I trust a man today, he will betray the trust and turn against me tomorrow. Keep your power and trust in yourself, do not hand it over to others. A good rider manages his mount by means of the rein and the bit, a sovereign should govern in like manner. Do not trust anybody, do not delegate power to anybody. Keep all power in your own hands, keep your generals and officials under your heel and get good work out of them."

"Sire, a man is not a horse , he has qualities of greatness and self-respect "

'I know a man is not a horse, and therefore, instead of rein and bit, I employ honours and punishment to manage him , I confer honours on the man who works well, I punish him who fails The desire for honours and the fear of punishment are the driving forces Power, trust, counsel—these Aurangzeb will keep to himself , he will trust in his own physical force "

"Sire, a man has other emotions besides a desire for honours and fear of punishment Nobleness, ambition, self-pride—these are some of his finest qualities The man who works for fear of punishment is satisfied when the work is done anyhow , but a man who is honoured, treated with respect, and entrusted with power, will strive to be worthy of the trust and honour conferred, and in the performance of his duty, will sacrifice his wealth, his pride, and perhaps even his life Our sacred books furnish copious examples of such cases

"Danesh Manda," said Aurangzeb, "I am not as familiar with the sacred books as you are , I do not believe in poetic maxims , my study has been human nature , I have seen very little of nobleness in man , craftiness, flattery, breach of faith, I have seen in abundance , my reading of human nature has taught me to keep all power in my

own hands That explains the *jizya* tax on the Kafers, the rigorous rule over hostile Rajputs, my purpose to cleanse the Mahratta country of my enemies, to conquer Bijapur and Golconda, and to establish my rule from the Himalayas in the north to the great ocean in the south I shall seek assistance from nobody , I shall justify my name of Alamgir ”

His eyes gleamed with exultation He seldom revealed his inner self, but today in the course of conversation the curtain had been partially lifted Besides, Danesh Manda was an upright man, and self-revelation to him, he knew, would do no harm

After a long pause Aurangzeb spoke again with a smile “And now do you understand, my righteous friend, my purpose and my methods ?”

If the Emperor had accepted the frank advice of his friend Danesh Manda and had substituted a magnanimous policy of trust and toleration for a questionable state craft, the Moghul Empire perhaps would not have collapsed so suddenly

While the conversation was proceeding, Ram Singh, the son of Raja Jai Singh, was announced The Emperor ordered him to be admitted

“Your Majesty will pardon my intrusion, but I have received serious news from my father which I have come to announce ”

“We have also received news from him today

and possess the latest information," answered Aurangzeb

"Then Your Majesty is aware that my father, after destroying the enemy's forces, has invaded Bijapur and penetrated to the gates of the city But he cannot take it for lack of men, especially as the defenders have received the support of the Sultan of Golconda who has sent his famous general Nakaram Khan with a strong force to protect the city "

"I know this "

"My father is still continuing the fight by your Majesty's command, but it will be impossible for him to make headway unless he receives reinforcements He prays for reinforcements "

"Your father is a brave soldier and possesses ample resources , he can capture the city with his own men "

"He will do all that is humanly possible, Emperor He overcame Sivaji whom none others could tackle , he has penetrated into Bijapur which has never been done before, and now he prays for a small additional force to complete his task of conquest The whole of Southern India will then come under Moghul rule "

In these conditions any other monarch would have sent the aid required to complete the conquest of Southern India Aurangzeb, however, trusted to his far-sightedness and his genius for

state-craft He had his own reasons for not sending the assistance prayed for "Ram Singh,"⁴ he said, "I regard your father as one of my dearest friends, and I am deeply grieved to learn of the difficult predicament in which he is involved Please inform him that the Emperor will pray night and day for his success which, however, he must achieve with his own troops We are very short of men in Delhi and it is impossible for us to send reinforcements "

"Your Majesty," pleaded Ram Singh, "my father is an old and faithful servant of the crown He has conducted many wars under you, as well as under your father, and achieved notable results , he has no other ambition than to render faithful service to the Empire , there is great danger that he may be destroyed with all his men unless he receives aid immediately "

Poor Ram Singh did not know that tears and pleading were puerile weapons against the firm secret purpose which Aurangzeb had deliberately formed What was this purpose ? Jai Singh was a powerful general with a numerous force and a great name He had served the Empire faithfully, it was true, but the great power that he wielded had to be curbed Jai Singh could not be trusted with such power If he failed in the great war he was waging, the Emperor's purpose would be served If he was destroyed with his army at

the gates of Bijapur, a possible enemy would be removed. Aurangzeb had spread an intricate and far-extending web like that of a spider, Jai Singh was caught in it, escape was impossible.

Jai Singh, it was true, had dedicated his life to the service of the state, that was no reason why the web should cease to operate.

Aurangzeb placed no trust in compassion, pity and other human emotions, they did not come within the scope of his calculations. He removes a worm today to clear his path, tomorrow he kills his brother, he does both without feeling or emotion, to implement a fixed plan. His father, brother, nephew, came in the way of his advancement, he removed them. He spared his father not from pity, he killed his elder brother not from any feeling of anger, these puerile emotions had no place in his constitution. There was no danger in keeping his father alive, he would never give him further trouble, and so his father lived. But his brother's continued existence might imperil his plans at some future time, and so his brother died.

It was necessary that Jai Singh with his army should be removed. Whether he was good or bad, loyal or disloyal, were irrelevant facts, he had to go. Some months later news arrived in Delhi that Jai Singh had lost the war and had died since. Some historians are of opinion that poison was responsible for his death.

After a long pause Ram Singh spoke "Your Majesty, I have another prayer,"

"What is it?"

"My father made a solemn promise to Sivaji that he would suffer no harm in Delhi"

"Your father mentioned that to us"

"A Rajput never breaks his word It is my father's earnest prayer, and my prayer, that Your Majesty will kindly pardon him if he has committed any offence and to let him depart in peace"

Aurangzeb suppressed his feelings and quietly replied "The sovereign will do what he considers right, you need have no fears"

Another fly was caught in the web This was Sivaji, neither Danesh Manda or Ram Singh could extricate him

Sivaji had also been guilty of the same crime as Jai Singh After the treaty of peace with the Emperor he had espoused the cause of the empire, and with his own men, had achieved many successes on its behalf But his power was immense Aurangzeb could never permit the continuance of such power, he could not trust any man

Distrust creates disloyalty Even during the reign of Aurangzeb the Mahrattas and Rajputs raised a blaze of war, the conflagration spread far and wide and reduced the Moghul Empire to ashes

CHAPTER XXVII

SICKNESS

Sivaji is seriously ill. This is the talk of the town. His doors and windows are shut, physicians are in attendance day and night. The cure is doubtful, the condition is so serious that he may not survive the night. Occasional rumours announce his death. People passing that way halt for a moment and point a finger at his residence. Soldiers on horseback and other troops make inquiries from the guard. Rajas and mansabdars rise in their litters as they pass, and try and get a peep into the house. Sivaji's condition, the chances of his cure, whether he will survive the night,—these agitate the public mind. Aurangzeb makes inquiries regularly after Sivaji but the police watch is continued. He expresses his deep concern for Sivaji, but his death would lift a great burden from his mind without public reproach on himself.

It is evening. A grey-bearded physician dismounts from his litter in front of Sivaji's residence. He announces that he has been commanded by the Emperor to visit the patient, and is at once allowed admittance.

Sivaji is in his bed. His attendant informs him that a *hakim* sent by the Emperor is in attendance. He immediately suspects some evil design on the part of the Emperor. "Express my thanks to the *hakim*," he says, "and tell him I am under the treatment of my own Hindu *Kavirajes*. I am a Hindu and I wish to be treated by Hindu physicians. Ask the *hakim* to express my deep gratitude to the Emperor."

Before the attendant can leave his master's bedside the *hakim* walks into the room. Sivaji is deeply annoyed, but suppressing his feelings he mutters a few gracious words, and motions him to a seat by his bedside.

There is nothing in the appearance of the physician to arouse suspicion. His age is great, his flowing grey beard covers his chest, he wears an enormous turban, his voice is deep and his speech slow.

"Maharaj," he said, "I have overheard your orders to your servant. You do not desire my treatment, but my duty is to save human life, and I must perform my duty."

"The devil take the man," thought Sivaji, but he said nothing.

"What is your trouble?" inquired the physician.

"I do not know. My body burns, there is pain in the heart and aches in all my limbs."

"Anger causes an intense burning sensation and pain in the heart, and is often brought on by mental causes," said the *hakim* slowly "What is your illness?"

Surprised and somewhat alarmed Sivaji cast his eyes on the physician. His grave countenance featured no emotion. Sivaji made no reply. The *hakim* wished to examine him. Sivaji was seriously alarmed, but ultimately submitted.

After a very careful examination the physician spoke "Your pulse is not as weak as I would expect from the nature of your voice, your arteries function normally, the muscles of your body are still very active. Are you malingering?"

Sivaji fixed a keen gaze at the physician. His countenance was grave and unperturbed, there was no mischief in his eyes. The patient's blood warmed up, but in a feeble voice he said "Your diagnosis is the same as that of other physicians. There are no physical symptoms of this terrible disease, which is destroying my life inch by inch."

The physician mused for a long while and then spoke "Our medical books deal with one thousand and one diseases, some of those diseases manifest no outward symptoms and their remedies are prescribed. The remedy for prisoners who feign illness in order to avoid work is decapitation. There is another illness to which

young men are particularly prone when they become wasters and take the path to hell. The remedy prescribed for the disease is chastisement by means of the slipper. A third kind of illness, which shows no physical symptoms, seizes crafty people when they wish to conceal their nefarious designs. I shall prescribe for this illness in your case.

Sivaji did not quite follow these remarks but he fully realized that the physician was keen-witted and understood the nature of his trouble. Not knowing exactly what to say, he asked, "What is the medicine?"

"It is an excellent remedy, but it is a deadly poison. If you are really ill, the cure is certain, if there is deception, your death is equally certain."

Sivaji's heart flutters, he wipes the perspiration from his brow. If he refused to take the medicine he would be found out, if he agreed to take it he would die.

The physician prepared the medicine and offered it to him. "This liquid is touched by a Mahomedan, I am a Hindu. I cannot take it," said Sivaji.

He flung away the cup with great violence. The physician preserved his calm. "Feebleness is certainly not a symptom of your trouble," he remarked quietly.

Sivaji had so long suppressed his feelings,

he could do so no longer, and suddenly sat up in his bed "This is the punishment for trifling with a patient" With these words he grasped the beard of the physician and struck him across the face The beard, much to his surprise, detached itself from the face, the voluminous turban was thrown off, and he beheld before him the smiling countenance of his old friend Tannaji Malasri

The latter burst out into a fit of laughter, then restraining his hilarious feelings he rose and shut the door "Master," he said "is this the usual fee you pay to your physicians? If so, the death of the physician is more to be feared than that of the patient My ears are still tingling with the stunning blow you have delivered"

"My friend," said Sivaji, "if you play with a tiger you can't expect to get off unscathed, anyhow, I am really very pleased to see you, I have been expecting you the last few days Now tell me the news"

"I have carried out all your orders, let me give you the details The permits issued by the Emperor have enabled all your troops to leave Delhi safely"

"I thank God for His kindness, I feel greatly relieved, I am not worrying about myself, a bird that lives in the air cannot long be held cage-bound"

"Those troops," continued Tannaji, "are now

in Mathura and Brindaban in the guise of goswamis, the temple priests in Mathura are expecting you every day I have very carefully examined the route from Delhi to Mathura and have stationed men at the spots you mentioned ”

“My old friend,” said Sivaji, “I know you are splendidly efficient, I am sure I shall be able to get home safely ”

“At the spot you mentioned outside the Delhi wall there is a fleet horse On the day you fix everything will be ready ”

“Good ”

“I have met Prince Ram Singh, the son of Raja Jai Singh I reminded him of the promise his father made to you The prince is as straightforward and truthful as his father He approached the Emperor and pleaded your cause before him ”

“What did the Emperor say ?”

“He said he would do what he considered right ”

“Ha ! the crafty man ! Sivaji will have his revenge some day ”

“Prince Ram Singh failed to achieve his purpose, but he came to me and said, ‘A Rajput always fulfils his promise’ Money, force, every means in his power, he will employ to implement that promise, he will sacrifice his life if necessary ”

"A worthy son of a worthy father," exclaimed Sivaji, "but I don't want him to get into trouble. You have told him of my plan of escape."

"I have, sire, and he is extremely happy, he will do his best to assist you."

"Good."

"Besides this, by sweet words and money I have won over many of Aurangzeb's counsellors. All the great men of Delhi, Hindus and Mahomedans, are on your side and have spoken on your behalf. But Aurangzeb will not listen to them."

"Then everything is ready," said Sivaji, "I can get well now."

"You can't help getting well when a clever physician like myself has taken you in hand," said Tannaji with a smile, "but I had prepared some excellent *Sharbat* for you which you threw away."

"Make me another glass, Tannaji."

Tannaji obeyed. Sivaji drank it off. "Your medicine is as efficacious as it is tasty. I am already quite well."

Tannaji affectionately embraced Sivaji, assumed his turban and beard, and left. He was questioned by the guard at the gate about Sivaji's condition.

"The illness is very serious," Tannaji replied, "but my medicine is infallible, and he is already

better Within a few days he will be completely well ”

The *hakim* went away in his litter

“He must be very good,” said one of the guard , he has cured in one day a disease which so many vaidyas had vainly tackled ”

“You must remember,” said another man, “that he is the Emperor’s *hakim* ”

CHAPTER XXVIII

CONVALESCENCE

A few days after the incident mentioned in the last chapter news spread through the town that Sivaji was well on the way to recovery. This was the general talk. Hindus naturally jubilated over the news, and kindly Mahomedans also felt happy that things had turned out well. People gossiped about this in the streets, ghats, shops, musjids, and the Emperor expressed his delight on receiving the news.

Joy and excitement filled the city. Large quantities of corn began to be distributed to the Brahmins, offerings were sent to the temples, and rich gifts were made to physicians. The bazaars were denuded of confectionary, for Sivaji had purchased the entire stock and was sending sweets in enormous quantities to all the great men of the town. Large presents were made to well-known people, and sweetmeats was despatched even to the Mahomedan mosques and colonies of fakirs. Whatever might have been the inner thoughts of the Emperor, the whole city resounded with the praise of Sivaji's munificence. There was a lavish distribution of *Dilhi ka Laddu*. We do

not know about its effect on others, but the Emperor very soon had cause for regret

Not content with merely distributing sweetmeats, Sivaji commenced to bring in large quantities of the choicest dainties to his own house, arranged them in colossal baskets and sent them to different people. Some of these baskets were three or four cubits across and had to be carried by ten or twelve men. This continued for some days

It is evening. Two such enormous baskets are brought out of Sivaji's residence. "For whom are these meant?" asks the guard. "For Raja Jai Singh's household," is the reply. "How long will these presents continue?"

"Today is the last day."

The men lift the baskets and carry them away.

The shadows of the evening descended upon the city. The baskets were transported some distance, and in a solitary spot were lowered and placed on the ground. There was no one stirring, a deep silence prevailed, only from time to time came the sigh of the breeze. The men made a sign. From one basket appeared the form of Sivaji, from the other that of his son, Sambhaji. They rendered their heart-felt thanks to the Almighty.

They wore disguises. Without loss of time they made their way towards the city wall.

There were few people about, but the occasional sight of a passer by made Sambhuji's heart flutter. Sivaji had been used to dangers throughout his life, this was no new experience for him, but still he was not quite free from apprehension.

They crossed the city wall. A warder challenged them.

"We are Goswamis," answered Sivaji "O Hari ! O Hari ! O Hari !"

"Your destination ?"

The shrines of Mathura कलौ नास्त्येव नास्त्येव नास्त्येव गतिरन्यथा ।"

They passed out safely.

There were palatial mansions of the wealthy outside the city wall. Sivaji made his way across and increased his pace.

In the distance he saw a steed tethered to a tree. He approached the animal, it answered to the description that Tannaji had given.

"What is your name ?" he asked the man who was standing nearby.

"Janaki Nath "

"Where do you go ?" asked Sivaji.

"To Mathura "

Yes, this was the horse for a certainty. Sivaji mounts and takes Sambhuji behind him and makes his way towards Mathura. The man follows them on foot.

The night is dark. Sivaji is making his escape.

through silent villages and open fields. There is a glimmer of stars in the sky, an occasional cloud floats across, the broad Jamuna, swelled by recent rain, flows swiftly casting its waters on the ghats and pathways. Sivaji with a restless heart is making his escape.

From a distance comes the sound of horses' feet. Sivaji looks round for some place where he can conceal himself, but he is in an open road with no huts or trees close by. He continues his journey.

There are three horsemen, they are moving swiftly towards Delhi. They see Sivaji and come up to him.

"Who are you?"

"A Goswami."

"Where do you come from?"

"From Delhi."

"Where are you going?"

"To Mathura."

"We don't quite know the road to Delhi. Come with us and show us the way, and then you can go to Mathura."

This was a bolt from the blue. If Sivaji refused, the men would compel him by force to go with them. If there was a quarrel, he might be recognized, for there was hardly a man in Delhi who had not seen Sivaji, if he returned to Delhi he would be faced with a thousand dangers.

Sivaji makes no reply

While the conversation is going on with one of the men, the other two remain behind and talk in whispers

"I have heard the voice before , I am certain he is not a goswami "

"Then, who is he ?"

"I suspect the man is Sivaji himself , two men cannot have exactly the same voice "

"You are talking nonsense Sivaji is a prisoner in Delhi "

"That is what we think , we also thought Sivaji was in Singharh when he was actually in Poona, and within the four walls of Sayestha Khan's house "

"Our doubts can easily be dispelled , we have only to remove his headgear and examine the man "

One of the horsemen comes up to Sivaji and strikes off his turban Sivaji recognizes the man He was a well-known officer under Sayestha Khan

If he had any weapon with him Sivaji would have tackled all the three men He strikes one of these men with his fist and throws him senseless on the ground The other two close round, seize him, and pull him down

Sivaji mutters a silent prayer , he is a prisoner again, utterly without aid, and his death is now

certain He turns his gaze at Sambhuji ' his eyes moisten

A sudden noise diverts his thoughts One of the horsemen, pierced with an arrow, is rolling on the ground The whistle of another arrow and yet another All the three men have fallen Their lifeless bodies lie in the dust

Muttering his thanks to the Almighty, Sivaji rises from the ground and looks round He sees Janaki Nath, the groom or footman, standing at some distance The timely arrows had apparently been discharged by him Sivaji calls him As he approaches Sivaji is amazed to find that the man is not just a menial, as he had supposed, but Sitapati Goswami in the guise of a footman

Sivaji expresses his heart-felt gratitude, his deep regret at his mistake and asks his forgiveness "Sitapati," he exclaims with fervent feeling, "you are my truest friend, always by my side in times of danger Forgive me for treating you as a menial What reward can I offer you for the great service you have rendered ?"

Sitapati kneels down before his master, and with folded hands says "Pardon my disguise, sire, I am neither a footman nor Sitapati Goswami, I am your old servant, Raghunath Havildar I have worshipped you from my boyhood, my prayer is to be allowed to serve you all my life, I ask for no other favour If I have

committed any fault unknowingly, sire, I ask your forgiveness ”

Amazed and bewildered Sivaji gazes at him, and then with an outburst of feeling and tears flowing from his eyes he clasps Raghunath to his bosom “Raghunath ! Raghunath !” he exclaims , “I have sinned, sinned terribly, but God knows, your magnanimous conduct towards me has been a sufficient punishment I suspected you, I insulted you, the thought breaks my heart So long as Sivaji lives he will remember your noble and generous conduct, and if the great debt he owes you can be repaid, he will strive his uttermost to repay it ”

In the hush of the night their deep feelings mingle in a loving embrace Raghunath’s vow has been fulfilled, Sivaji’s regrets have passed , they weep together like children

CHAPTER XXIX

IN HER HOME

We come back to the day when Sarayu met Sitapati Goswami on the river bank. She returned home at night. There was an aching void within her heart. The young soldier whom Sarayu had first met in the fortress of Torna and had chosen as her own, and to whom she was betrothed, was gone, perhaps never to return. The world seemed utterly empty.

Days, weeks and months passed, there was no news of him. She would sit by her window and sometimes pass whole nights with thoughts of him, in the morning, when the bright sun shone, she would gaze at the silent path which led out and faded in the distant horizon, but he never returned.

In the afternoon she would wander among the mango groves and pass pensive hours with her old memories. The fortress of Torna, the pearl necklace, the events at Raigarh, the last parting, rose like living pictures before her mind's eye. Silent tears trickled down her pale cheeks, and at night the flood gates would open and a paroxysm of pain would release a copious flow of tears.

Silent and alone, she would cry like a child to relieve the great sorrow within her heart. The golden light of dawn streaming through the window would find a figure prostrate on the floor.

In the morning she was in the garden with her flowers. She would pick those she loved best and press them to her bosom, and her tears would mingle with the dew that rested on the blossoms. Of an evening she would sometimes take up her vina or harp and give vent to her secret sorrow in song, a sad music which drew the tears of her attendants. Nature gave way under the strain. She became thin and pale and dark rings appeared below her eyes. Her foster father, Janardan, knew nothing of the trouble within her heart, but he noticed her failing health, and this made him anxious.

A woman understands the woman's heart, and Sarayu's secret was no longer a secret from her attendants. In their conversations with Janardan they dropped hints as to the remedy. Sarayu was no longer a little child, she was quite grown up, and perhaps marriage might be the best remedy. Sarayu heard of this. "Tell my father," she said, "I shall never marry, I shall dedicate my life to his service."

Janardan treated this as childish and commenced to look about for a suitable bridegroom. This was not difficult. A Kshatriya girl reared by

a Brahmin priest can easily find an eligible husband. A marriage was arranged with a well-known Kshatriya officer under Jai Singh. Sarayu heard of this, a shiver ran through her frail body, she cast aside all shame. "Tell my father," she said, "that he has already given his word to a Rajput officer, he is my betrothed, if I marry another I shall be guilty of unfaithfulness."

Janardan was annoyed at this message. He rebuked Sarayu and spent anxious hours in his room. He brushed aside her objection, fixed a day for her marriage, and sent word to Raja Jai Singh. Sarayu heard of this. She went to Janardan and fell at his feet. "Father," she cried, "please do not try to force me or you will lose your daughter forever." Janardan lifted her up and pressed her to his bosom.

But who listens to the prayers of a daughter? We act according to the wishes of the society in which we move. The marriage day approached; Janardan argued and rebuked but without avail, and then on the day before the marriage he said, "Foolish child, do you wish to bring disgrace on me and the noble family to which I belong?"

"Father" replied Sarayu in a gentle voice, "I am not foolish, forgive me if I have done anything wrong. May God help me, but no disgrace will come to you through me."

Janardan did not understand the significance

of these words that day , their full meaning he learnt on the day following The preparations of the wedding were complete, but the bride could not be found

CHAPTER XXX

IN A COTTAGE

It is autumn. A bright sun flashes its light on the waters of the Nira as that river, swelled by rain, flows swiftly through a rich and golden country. The fields on either side are laden with full grown crops, the fruit of the worship offered by farmers to mother earth. On the north and east lies a broad expanse of waving corn, dotted here and there with small hamlets, on the south and west stretch tall mountain ranges shimmering in the morning light.

There is a neat green village by the side of the river bordered by the gold of the corn fields. A child is playing by the side of the river near a small cottage, there is a girl standing by, the farmer's wife is engaged in household duties.

The neat cottage proclaims the prosperity of its owner. In the courtyard are granaries, and a number of cows are tethered on one side. The cottage consists of three or four rooms inside and one outside. The owner, though a farmer, is one of the leading men of the village, he has besides a small money-lending business.

The child is seven years of age. She is rather

dark We find her playing about, running to her mother in the kitchen, then running back to the girl who is looking after her, clasping her hands and chatting

"Sister, come let us go to the river and catch some fish "

"No, my child" said the attendant, "your mother will be angry "

"O, mother won't know "

"No my child, you must not disobey your mother it is wrong "

"Tell me, sister, is mother also your mother ?"

"O yes "

"No, tell me truly "

"Yes, she is my mother "

"No, sister, you are a Rajput girl , we are not Rajputs "

She kissed the child "Then why do you ask ?"

"Because you call mother mother," said the child

"She has given me a place to stay in, she gives me food and looks after me Why shouldn't I call her mother ? I have no home in this world and she has given me a home "

"But why do you cry ? I often find you crying "

"Well, I won't cry any more "

"Your tears bring tears to my eyes," said the child

"That's because you love me, my darling," she kissed the child

"But don't you love me ?" asked the child

"O, I do "

"You will always love me , you will never forget me ?"

"Never, and you will always love me and never forget me, darling ?"

"I won't forget you "

"O, you'll forget me one day

"When ?" asked the child

"When your bride-groom comes"

"And when will that be ?"

"O, within two or three years "

"No, sister, I shall never forget you , I shall love you more than the bridegroom And you won't forget me when your bridegroom comes ?

Her eyes again filled with tears "I can never forget you "

"And you will love me more than your bridegroom ?"

"Just as much," and she laughed

"And when will your bridegroom come ?"

"God alone knows Let me go, darling , I must help your mother with her cooking "

It is needless to tell the reader that the girl was no other than Sarayu Bala Homeless and alone, she found employment as a maid in the cottage of Gokarna, the farmer This man had

some property and also a small money-lending business. He was generous hearted and gladly offered the orphan food and shelter. Gokarna's wife was equally kind. She took in the Rajput girl and treated her like her own daughter. Sarayu felt very grateful, and she gladly performed all the domestic duties, helped with the cooking, looked after the little child, and in every way did her utmost to please her mistress. The latter became deeply attached to Sarayu.

If happiness was possible for Sarayu, Gokarna's home could make her happy. Gokarna was forty-five years of age, but a methodical and active life had kept him well preserved. His only son, Bhimji, was a soldier in Sivaji's army, and had not been home for a long time. His daughter, the little child, was the pet of the family. Gokarna would leave home early in the morning to look after his farm and do his other duties, and Sarayu would attend to the household work. Gokarna's wife often protested. "You belong to a high class family," she would say, "you are not used to this kind of work, how long will your body stand the strain? I shall do all the household work." "Your great kindness, mother, lightens my work," Sarayu would say, "may you always love me, and I would wish for nothing better than to work for you." The old woman would wipe her eyes and say, "I have never seen any girl like you; if I

found one like you within our community I could be assured of my son's happiness" The thought of her absent son would bring tears to her eyes

Some months passed We find one evening the husband and wife seated together, and Sarayu with the little child in her lap, in a corner of the room

"I have good news to give you," says the husband

"May God bless you Have you any news of our son, Bhimji?"

"I shall soon get news of him He went to Delhi with Sivaji I have learnt today that Sivaji has made his escape and is now in his native land Bhimji must be with him"

"May your words prove true," said the wife fervently "I have not seen him for a whole year, God alone knows how I have missed him"

"Bhimji must come back, he served under Raghunathji Havildar, there is news of this man"

Sarayu's heart fluttered, with baited breath she continued to listen

"Do you remember what our son said on the day Sivaji dismissed Raghunathji as a spy?"

"O, how can I remember all this? I am a woman"

"Well, he said, 'Father, I know the havildar

quite well , Sivaji has not a finer soldier in his army Sivaji will soon find out what a terrible mistake he has made in insulting and dismissing him , he will then realize Raghunath's great virtues ' The words of my son have proved true "

Uncontrollable joy and excitement made Sarayu's heart beat fast , she wiped the perspiration from her brow Gokarna Nath continued to speak

"Raghunathji disguised himself and went to Delhi with his master, and by a clever ruse achieved his freedom He has proved his own innocence, and I hear that Sivaji expressed his regret and embraced him like a brother From the rank of a havildar Raghunath has been made a commander of five thousand Everybody is talking about this You hear of nothing else but Raghunath's virtues in the towns and villages all over the country , it is one long praise "

Sarayu could control her feelings no longer. "Oh God !" she cried, "I thank Thee "

CHAPTER XXXI

A DREAM

A change came over Sarayu from that day. After a long time hope and joy found a place in her heart. Her eyes smiled, her lips freshened with the bloom and scent of a flower, her brow and neck took on a new colour, and her lovely long hair assumed a soft lustre and caressed a radiant face. In the early dawn with a joyous heart she would listen to the notes of the kokil as they floated through the air from a distant tree, and when the sun turned west, strolling out in the open, she would shade her eyes with her hand and look at the distant landscape across the river with a longing gaze. And again, in the evening, the sudden music of a flute would wake her to a sense of joyous expectation.

Even Gokarna's little child noticed the change. While strolling towards the river one day she remarked, "You are getting more and more beautiful every day."

"Who says that?"

"Can't I see?"

"You can't, you see wrong."

"O indeed! and those flowers in your hair,

what do they mean? You never had them before "

"Nonsense "

"And the string of pearls and corals which you wear so secretly , O, I have caught you "

"O, nonsense "

"And why do you gaze at the reflection of your beautiful face in the water? I have seen you do that when we go to the river-side "

"Don't tell stories "

"And the sweet songs you sing when you go into the woods , haven't I heard them ?"

Sarayu put her hand over the child's mouth to stop her speaking She burst out laughing , "I'll tell mother," she said

"O please don't I beg of you "

"Then you promise to tell me what I ask "

"I promise "

"Tell me why you do all this , the flowers in your hair, the necklace, the sweet songs—whom are they for? The smile in your eyes, the crimson on your lips, your growing loveliness—whom are they for?" asked the child

"Your mother does your hair so nicely in a beautiful knot , and she adorns you with jewels and ornaments , why does she do this, my little child ?"

She blushed "Mother told me I would get married next year , a bridegroom will come "

"So will mine "

"Really ?"

While this conversation was going on, a Sanyasi approached the river-bank and sat down at the water's edge "Hara, Hara, Mahadev !" he exclaimed His tall figure, besmeared with ashes, had a strange beauty in the fading light The little child was frightened, and she ran home Sarayu recognized him It was Sitapati Goswami

Her heart fluttered, she trembled with a sudden feeling of joy Suppressing her feeling and her natural bashfulness, she approached him, bowed down and touched his feet She spoke in a low voice 'The unfortunate girl you saw one day at the house of Janardan, the priest, is now a maid-servant in that cottage you see I left my father because I had disgraced myself in his eyes, but God knows, my only fault was faithfulness to my beloved, I have done no other wrong"

"And you suffered for the sake of Raghunath ?"
The Sanyasi's eyes moistened

"No woman regards suffering as suffering so long as she is true to her beloved "

The Sanyasi heaved a sigh

"Have you met him ?" she asked

"Yes "

"Did you tell him what I said to you ?"

"Yes "

"What did you tell him ?"

"I did not omit a single word of what you said I told him Sarayu is a Rajput, she values honour more than life, so long as she lives she will always think of him as a brave and noble hero "

"And then ?"

"I said more If he loses his life in the discharge of his duty, Sarayu will sacrifice her own with his praise on her lips "

"And then ?"

"Sarayu will do nothing," I said, "to thwart his noble ambition Let Ragunath carve out a path of honour for himself with his sword, and the great Creator will help him "

"And what did he say ?" asked Sarayu in a tremulous voice

"He made no reply, he treasured your words in his heart and performed the impossible, he has carved a path of honour for himself" The Sanyasi's words seem to burn like fire

In the fading light his eyes glowed like a flame, and his deep voice roused an echo in the vibrating air

"I bow to Him, the Great Creator of the Universe" She gazed into the sky, folded her hands and bowed down to the ground The Sanyasi did the same

There was a long pause The shadows of evening descended, the evening air soothed her body and dried her tears

The Sanyasi spoke again

"After achieving his purpose Raghunath asked me to give you a message "

"What is it ? Tell me "

"You have not seen for a long time He wants to know whether you will recognize him if you see him "

"Can I ever forget his form and features ?"

"He knows of your great love for him, but a woman's memory is short "

The Sanyasi smiled She felt annoyed and said, "I did not know till now that woman's memory is short "

"Nor did I until today "

"Until today ?" she repeated

"A girl loved me , she has forgotten me, she does not know me," said the Sanyasi

"Who is this unfortunate girl ?"

"She is a beautiful maiden to whom I lost my heart in a garden in the fortress of Torna I placed a string of pearls round her neck Her vision followed me from the fortress to Jai Singh's camp, through wars and strifes and truces and filled my life with dreams She is the divine creature whose countenance is sunlight to my eyes, whose voice is music in my ears, whose touch is sandal balm, whose love is the life of my life Her memory, her sweet words of exhortation, inspired me in Delhi, stimulated my achievements, and pro-

tected me from danger After many years of strife and peril I have come back to her once again But she does not know me ”

The music of his voice raised a storm of emotion within her breast, and she knew the tall god-like form beside her A whirlwind swept through her brain, her eyes closed “Raghunath, forgive me” This was all that she could say as she stretched her hands to him He took her in his arms and pressed her palpitating heart to his bosom

How long she remained thus she did not know , then with a thill she realized the ardent caress of her beloved

The burning pain in her heart, long endured in patience and silence, passed away , she felt his warm breath on her face, and the touch of his soft lips on hers

A shiver ran through her body , the lips met again in a long ardent caress

Was this a dream ?

She shook like a leaf in a strong wind “O God,” she murmured, “if this is a dream, let it last forever ”

CHAPTER XXXII

THE LIGHT DIES OUT

There is jubilation in the Mahratta country Sivaji has returned , he will take up arms again, scatter the foe and establish Hindu Raj This is the talk of the land

Raja Jai Singh had launched an attack on the city of Bijapur, but he could make no headway His appeals for reinforcements were cruelly negatived, and at last he realized the grim truth that Aurangzeb's purpose was his destruction He retreated with his army towards Aurangabad

To the very last he remained loyal to the Emperor The treatment he had received in no way affected his zeal in the cause which he served When he realized that a retreat from the Mahratta country was inevitable, he did his utmost to maintain as far as possible the strength of the Empire He garrisoned Singhagarh, Purandar, and other places, and the fortresses he could not behold he completely destroyed, so that the enemy might not derive any advantage from them

But in this world there is no reward for loyal service. Aurangzeb felt pleased at Jai Singh's

failure , to humiliate him further, he took away the southern command from him and summoned him to Delhi Jaswant Singh was substituted in his place

Raja Jai Singh had served the Empire to the best of his ability throughout his life This last act to humiliate him broke his heart, and on his way back he was seized by an illness from which he never recovered

One day while he lay ill in bed a Mahratta visitor was announced He craved an audience with him

"Receive him courteously and ask him to come in," said Raja Jai Singh "I know him He is a noble, a brave man Tell him there is nothing to fear "

He entered , he was disguised, but the Raja knew him "Sivaji" he said, ' I am very happy to see my old friend once more before I pass away I am unable to rise from my bed , you will forgive me "

"Father," said Sivaji deeply moved, "when I last met you I never imagined I would see you in this condition so soon "

"A man's body lasts but a short time , there is nothing surprising in this When you last saw me you saw the Moghul Empire at the height of its glory What do you see now ?"

"Maharaja, you were the main pillar of the

Empire , your present condition points to its early collapse ”

“No, my boy,” answered Jai Singh, “Rajasthan is the birthplace of heroes , another Jai Singh may replace me , there are many brave and war-like men like Jai Singh still living , the death of a Jai Singh does not affect the destiny of an Empire ”

“Sir, there can be no greater calamity to the Empire than your death ”

“Sivaji, brave warriors can be replaced, but decay wrought by distrust and duplicity can never be repaired The retribution of sin and craftiness is destruction and death I said this before The evidence is before your eyes ”

“Kindly explain,” said Sivaji

“When, at my request, you visited Delhi, your heart had turned to the Emperor , you were resolved to be true to him so long as he was true to you If the Emperor had kept faith with you, today he would have a powerful friend in the Deccan , his crafty policy has converted a powerful friend into a deadly foe ”

“Maharaja, your wisdom and experience are unrivalled , you are justly noted as a very wise man ”

“I have been serving the Empire from the time of Aurangzeb’s father , I have devoted my best powers in Aurangzeb’s service in dangers and difficul-

ties , I have made no difference between my own countrymen and foreigners, or friends and strangers , I have faithfully fulfilled my duties In my old age the Emperor has treated me disrespectfully, and then he has humiliated me, but I have not been remiss in my duties The important forts that I have garrisoned, you will not be able to recover without a hard fight, Sivaji But Aurangzeb's conduct towards me has meant his own ruin The Rajas of Ambai have hitherto been his strongest support , they will henceforth be his greatest enemies ”

“What you say, sir, is perfectly true Aurangzeb's policy has converted two large and powerful communities, the Rajputs and the Mahrattas, into open enemies ”

“I have given you two examples, the Rajputs and the Mahrattas,” continued Jai Singh, ‘but the whole of Bharatvarsha is the same Aurangzeb has humiliated all his trusty servants throughout Bharatvarsha, he has converted friends into enemies, he has destroyed the holy temple in Benares and built a Mosque on that spot, he has humiliated the Hindus of Rajasthan, he has imposed the jiziya tax on the Hindus throughout his empire ”

The Raja closed his eyes and after a long pause spoke again The veil of the future seemed to be lifted, and the dying man, with

the second sight of a saint seemed to see the things to come "Sivaji," he said, "I see conflagration of war all round, Rajasthan, the Mahratta country, the eastern lands, are flames of open rebellion. For twenty years the Emperor strives his utmost to subdue the flames, but they spread. His powerful intellect, his state-craft, his military talent, have been exerted in vain. He dies, a disappointed man, in an agony of gnawing remorse and self-reproach. The fire burns more fiercely, and with a great roar swiftly advances from all directions, and the mighty Moghul Empire crashes and melts in the flames. And then? I see the Mahratta star rising in the sky. Mahrattas advance, take the vacant throne of Delhi."

Raja Jai Singh ceased to speak. The physicians who were by the bed-side, examined him and consulted together.

After a long pause he spoke again in a voice that sank into a whisper. "The crafty man punishes himself, *Satyameva jayati*—Truth ever triumphs."

He ceased to breathe, his great soul passed away.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE TRIAL

One evening we find Raghunath strolling alone by the river-side. New thoughts have filled his mind, thoughts of his advancement, of his meeting with Sarayu, of future wars and the freedom of the Hindu people. Suddenly he hears his name uttered by someone behind him.

He looked round. It was Chandra Rao Jumladar. A sudden fit of rage seized him, but he remembered the promise he had made in the Temple of Ishani.

"Raghunath, there is no room for both of us on this earth, one of us must go."

Controlling his temper he answered slowly, "Chandra Rao, crafty treacherous friend, your fit punishment is death, but I forgive you, ask forgiveness of God."

"I despise the words of a child, you have not long to live, listen to me. Since your birth we have been mortal enemies, I have hated you since your boyhood with all the hate I possess, a thousand times have I wished to blow out your brains. I refrained, but I destroyed your wealth, I crushed

your reputation, and you were hunted out of the country as a spy. My thirst for revenge was partly satiated. But your luck is bad, you have risen high and have come back to the army. I have never failed in my purpose, and shall not fail now. I discard other means. I shall pierce your heart with this sword, I shall drink your blood and quench my thirst. Coward! your death is certain."

Raghunath's eyes shot fire. He answered in a voice trembling with rage. "Vile man!" he cried, "get out of my sight, or I shall forget my promise and inflict the punishment you deserve."

"Coward! still afraid? Then listen. The arrow that pierced your father's heart in the fight at Ujjain was not an enemy arrow, it was an arrow from my bow."

Raghunath saw red, he heard nothing more, he flashed out his sword and struck. Chandra Rao was an expert fencer, and a duel commenced. Their shields were pierced, wounds inflicted, and the blood streamed freely. In physical strength Raghunath met his match in Chandra Rao, but the former had learnt the art of attack and defence in Delhi, and after a long struggle he felled his opponent, and with his knee planted on his chest he cried, "Despicable man, take the punishment of your wickedness, my father's death is avenged."

Fearless to the last, with a ghastly smile Chandra Rao exclaimed, "And your sister is widowed"

The horrible truth flashed through his mind And this was the reason why his sister had extracted the promise ? The murderer of his father was his sister's husband With flaming eyes Raghunath gazed at the prostrate man, but his sword remained motionless He relaxed his hold and rose to his feet Chandra Rao also rose

Covered with blood and dust, humiliated, with a demon's countenance, he fixed his blood-shot eyes on Raghunath The latter, stormed by violent passions roused by the thought of his father's murder, the insult to his sister, and burning for revenge, stood paralysed He could not strike At this moment there was a movement among the trees and a soldier appeared It was Sivaji

Without a word he pointed his finger at Chandra Rao Four men who followed him seized Chandra Rao, deprived him of his sword and shield, bound his hands behind his back and took him away Sivaji also vanished Startled at the incident Raghunath remained standing

The trial was held the following day The charge was not of murder for causing the death of Raghunath's father, nor of an attempt to cause Raghunath's death, the charge was for giving previous information to Rahmat Khan of the in-

tended attack on Rudra Mandal Chandra Rao was tried on this charge

The reader may remember that after the capture of this fortress, Sivaji had very generously given Rahmat Khan his freedom. The latter returned to his master, the Sultan of Bijapur. Rahmat Khan defended Bijapur against Raja Jai Singh, but he was wounded and captured. The Raja brought him to his own tent and procured for him all the medical assistance that was possible, but the wounds proved fatal.

The day before he died Jai Singh went to his bed-side. "I have done all that is possible," he said, "but the remedies have failed. May I have your permission to ask you a question now?"

"I shall not regret my death," answered Rahmat Khan, "my regret is that I have not been able to make any return for the great kindness and care which I have received from you. Ask me what you wish, I shall answer your question."

"You remember you received information about the attack on Rudra Mandal before the actual attack. I do not know who gave you the information, but I have discovered that an innocent man has been punished."

"I gave my word," answered Rahmat Khan, "not to disclose the name of the informer so long as I lived. Rajput, I am very grateful for your kindness, but a Pathan cannot break his word."

"I do not ask you to break your word," said the Raja, "but if you have any evidence in writing would you object to handing it to me?"

"Promise me that you will not look into it before my death"

The Raja made the promise Rahamat Khan made over some papers to him After the death of the Afgan chief Jai Singh read the papers and discovered that the informer was Chandra Rao

Jai Singh read a letter which was in the handwriting of Chandra Rao together with other relevant papers there was also a document acknowledging the receipt of money in the handwriting of Chandra Rao These papers were made over to Sivaji on the day that Jai Singh died

The trial was short The evidence was read aloud by Raghunath Niaya Sastri, Sivaji's trusted minister There was a roar of anger when the perusal concluded Chandra Rao was the spy, he gave the information for a bribe, and his purpose was to destroy Raghunath, an innocent man There was an outburst of deep indignation in the court

"Wicked spy," said Sivaji addressing the prisoner, "you have not long to live Do you wish to say anything?"

He was fearless and proud to the last "What shall I say?" he said, "you are noted for your justice You punish Raghunath one day, you

punish me today for the same offence, and to-morrow you will punish someone else. You will then realize that I am innocent. All these documents are forged."

Rage filled Sivaji's heart. "Cut off his hands," he ordered, "and he will take no more bribes, and then write the word 'spy' on his forehead with red-hot iron so that no one may ever believe him."

The executioner was about to carry out these orders when Raghunath stood up and said, "Maharaj, I have a prayer to make."

"I shall certainly listen to what you wish to say," said Sivaji, "this vile man wished to destroy you, what is the revenge you ask for?"

"Your promise you will fulfil, I know, the revenge that I seek is that not a hair of his head may be touched. Let him not be punished, give him his freedom, sire."

The court remained silent, amazed. Then Sivaji suppressing his wrath spoke.

"At your request I forgive him for the attempt on your life, the Raja has ordered his punishment for an offence against the state. I have given my orders, executioner, carry them out."

"Sire," said Raghunath, "your orders are just, it is a favour I seek from my master, please do not punish him, give him his freedom."

"I cannot grant your prayer, Raghunath, I forgive you for making this unreasonable request,

I would not have forgiven another man , I have given my orders , please do not interrupt ”

“On one or two occasions, sire, I happened to be of some service to you You promised me a reward. I pray for that reward today , please let this man go free ”

Sivaji's eyes flashed fire “Yes,” he exclaimed, “Raghunath, you wish to frustrate the course of justice because you rendered me service on certain occasions My orders must be carried out , and I shall feel happy if you will talk less of your brave deeds ”

Raghunath's face crimsoned He spoke slowly and in a trembling voice, “Sire, I am not in the habit of asking for favours This is the first favour I have ever asked , if you are unable to grant it, I shall not seek any other favour I shall ask your leave to depart , I shall retire from the profession of arms, I shall be a goswami and devote the rest of my life in prayers and pilgrimage ”

Sivaji remained silent and motionless. One of his men approached him and whispered that Chandra Rao was Raghunath's brother-in-law

Amazed at the information Sivaji ordered the prisoner to be released Then in a voice of thunder he exclaimed , ‘Go, Chandra Rao, leave my kingdom , go to other lands, kill other relatives, destroy other friends, take bribes from the enemy

and spend the rest of your life in acts of vile treachery ”

Chandra Rao was fearless to the last. Burning with rage he approached Raghunath. “Young man,” he said, “I scorn your mercy, I scorn the life that you have saved.” With these words he flashed out a dagger and plunged it in his own chest. Chandra Rao’s lifeless body rolled on the ground.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE DAWN OF MAHRATTA GLORY

It is yet dark Thin streaks of vermilion tinge the faint clouds on the eastern horizon Sivaji calls his generals and ministers, consults them, and then goes out in the open and summons his troops He addresses them

"One year has passed since I made peace with Aurangzeb," he said "Aurangzeb himself broke that peace by his perfidious conduct We shall be avenged We shall resume war against him

"The great Raja Jai Singh, Aurangzeb's finest general, against whom Goddess Ishani forbade my making war, the man who compassed my defeat without a fight, is a victim of Aurangzeb He is dead Soldiers, Aurangzeb is guilty of my captivity in Delhi, Jai Singh's death, and other acts of duplicity We shall be avenged

"In his death-bed Raja Jai Singh received a divine message His eyes beheld the Moghul Empire crashing in flames, the morning star of Mahratta glory rising, the golden throne of Prithu Rai without a lord Friends! Let us advance We shall adorn that throne with the splendour and

gorgeous heroism of our ancient past Behold
the crimson in the eastern sky It is the crimson
of a new dawn—not the dawn that greets us daily
People of the Mahratta country ! It is the dawn of
a new life, The Dawn of Mahratta Glory ”

He stopped There was a momentary hush,
and then with a great roar the troops responded,
The Dawn of Mahratta Glory ”

EPILOGUE

The story ends here The later career of Sivaji after the death of Jai Singh of Ambar, which occurred in 1667, and the subsequent political events in the reign of Aurangzeb, may be shortly stated for the information of the general reader We quote from Romesh Dutt's "Civilization of India " (Messrs Dent & Co , London, 1901)

"Jai Singh died on his way to Delhi Jaswant Singh could effect nothing and made a treaty with Sivaji acknowledging him as Raja Mahabat Khan, who was then sent with 40,000 troops by Aurangzeb, was not more successful, and a large Moghul force was defeated by Sivaji in battle In 1674 Sivaji again crowned himself as independent King

"In the following year Sivaji crossed the Narbada and for the first time carried his ravages north of that river In 1676 he crossed the Krishna to the south and passed close by Madras where the English were about to build a fort called Fort St David Sivaji's vast territory extended from the Narbada in the north to beyond Krishna in the south, and he died in the height of his power in 1680 Within the period of a lifetime he had

raised the Mahrattas to the rank of a great political power in India

"Aurangzeb's bigotry and intolerance completed the ruin of the Moghul Empire. He forbade all ostentatious display of Hindu worship, prohibited religious fairs and destroyed many famous Hindu temples. He imposed a tax called *jizya* on all non-Musalmans, and passed a senseless law that no Hindu should ride a litter or an Arab horse without permission. He commenced a cruel war against the Rajputs on trivial grounds, and for ever alienated that faithful nation from the house of Delhi. After the death of Sivaji he crossed the Narbada for the conquest of the Deccan.

"As the Mahrattas were now a great political power, it would have been wise in Aurangzeb to have left alone, and even strengthened, the feudatory Mahomedan states of Bijapur and Golconda. But the ungenerous and narrow mind of Aurangzeb was incapable of such a wise policy, he hankered to demolish and level down every semblance of authority except his own. He took Bijapur in 1686 and Golconda in 1687, and thus the last remains of the independent Bahmani Kingdom, founded in 1347, came to an end in the Deccan after 340 years.

"Aurangzeb now turned all his resources to crush the Mahrattas, and failed. The Mahrattas avoided a pitched battle, and their fleet horsemen

spread on every side and swept over the Deccan while Aurangzeb was fruitlessly besieging obscure forts 'By hard fighting,' says the Mahomedan historian, Khafi Khan, 'by the expenditure of the vast treasure accumulated by Shah Jahan, and by the sacrifice of many thousands of men, he (Aurangzeb) had penetrated into their wretched country, had subdued their lofty forts, and had driven them from house and home, still the daring of the Mahrattas increased, and they penetrated into the old territories of the imperial throne, plundering and destroying wherever they went'

"Enfeebled and exhausted by this system of warfare for nearly twenty years against an intangible foe, the grand army of Aurangzeb, which had invaded the Deccan with an ostentatious display of wealth and prowess never seen before in the south, retreated in disgrace and disorder amidst the shouts and insults and incessant firing of the Mahrattas who pressed behind Aurangzeb at last reached Ahmadnagar and died in 1707, amidst the ruin of a great empire caused by his intolerance and his bigotry within the period of his own lifetime "

